'RABINDRANATH TAGORE THE HUMANIST'

By

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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I

THE humanism of Rabindranath Tagore has two aspects: the actuality of individual joy and suffering in the concrete, and the reality of a world-culture of humanity as its background. Both give full scope for creation, one in the life of action, the other in the life of the spirit. Rabindranath has worked unwearyingly to relieve the distress due to flood and famine, chronic poverty, ill-health, and want of education in his own villages of Bengal; equally untiringly he has endeavoured to spread to the four corners of the world the message of the coming together of the races of mankind, of universal humanity. The Poet is not interested in the arid region of mere abstract principles. He does not believe in the cult of organised patriotism nor in that of an unfocussed cosmopolitanism. His is not the philosophy of negation, of barren renunciation, but a realization infinitely varied in content. Rabindranath has placed his faith in the Kingdom of Man on earth, rich with the variety of human relationships. For man's true freedom lies in the growth of personality, from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit, which finds its supreme expression in the divinity of Man the Eternal.

II

Rabindranath was born in the atmosphere of the advent of new deals in Bengal, ideals 'which at the same time were old, older than all the things of which that age was proud.'

That atmosphere was created mainly by Ram Mohun Roy. The Poet has repeatedly acknowledged that the first source of his inspiration was from that large-hearted man of gigantic intellect:

> Ram Mohun Roy was the first great man of our age with the comprehensiveness of mind to realize the fundamental unity of spirit in the Hindu, Moslem, and Christian cultures. He represented India in the fulness of truth, based not upon rejection but on perfect comprehension. I follow him, though he is practically rejected by my countrymen.

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* I have given everywhere a literal English translation of the original Bengali titles. The dates refer to the Bengali writings unless otherwise mentioned.

That atmosphere was a confluence of three movements—intel tual, spiritual, national—all of which were revolutionary. The Po father Debendranath was the great leader of that movement a Ram Mohun, a movement for the sake of which he suffered ostrac and braved social indignities. The Poet was thus born in a fam which had to live its own life, and which made him seek guidan for his self-expression in his own inner standard of judgment.

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the Poet's faith in own country and in a culture of universal humanity transcending barriers of time and place both find expression in his earliest writing At the age of sixteen he discussed the promotion of material prosper in Bengal, and the possibilities of building up a new civilizati through the meeting of East and West in an essay entitled *Hope a Despair of Bengalis* published in the *Bharati*. The titles of oth essays such as *The Anglo-Saxons and their Literature*, *Dante an Beatrice*, *Petrarch and his Laura*, *Goethe's Loves*, *Anglo-Norma Literature* and *Tasso* reveal his wide interests at this period (1878-80)

This was the time of the awakening of national sentiments Bengal, traces of the Poet's share in which are left in a number o patriotic songs of which *To you have I dedicated my body and m spirit, my Motherland* (1877) is probably the best known.

Along with the national movement occurred the neo-Hindu revival in Bengal. The sentimental obscurantism and the bellicos patriotism of this pseudo-religious movement repelled the Poet strongly, and with merciless logic and biting sarcasm he lashed the smug self-satisfaction and shallow boastings in scathing satire in *Boot rations*, *Loud Speaking*, *Tongue-waving*, *The Agitation of Neo-Bengalis*, and in a small group of poems in the *Manasi* : *Wild Hopes*, *Uplift of Our Country*, *The Heroes of New Bengal*, and *The Propagation of Religion*. The anger of the Poet flamed up against the social thinking which glorified caste and child-marriage and the sophistry which discovered pseudo-scientific justifications of unintelligent customs and fantastic superstitions in such essays as *Moustache and Eggs*, *Superiority of Monkeys*, *Truth*, *Hindu Marriage* and in the poem *Love-making of a newly-married Bengali Couple* (1882-88). The darkest pictures were, however, invariably relieved by touches of humour.

Rabindranath was convinced that there could be no real political progress until social injustices were removed. He asked his countrymen if the freedom to which they aspired was one of external condi-

tions. Was it a transferable commodity? Had they really acquired a true love of freedom? Had they faith in it?

Unless we have true faith in freedom, knowing it to be creative, manfully taking all its risks, not only do we lose the right to claim freedom in politics, but we also lack the power to maintain it with all our strength. Men who contemptuously treat their own brothers and sisters as eternal babies, never to be trusted in the most trivial details of their personal lives,—coercing them at every step by the cruel threat of persecution into following a blind lane leading nowhere, often driving them into hypocrisy and into moral inertia,—will fail over and over again to rise to the height of their true and severe responsibility.

In all these discussions he maintained, however, a remarkable detachment of mind, and although he always showed an enthusiastic appreciation of the intellectual greatness and strength of character of the European nations, he vigorously denounced the habit of blind imitation, and emphasized the need for preserving much of permanent value in the traditional culture of the country. In an article written in 1883, on the occasion of the opening of the National Fund, he foreshadows, at the age of twenty-two, his later outlook on the political work of the country. He protested against political agitation being made the sole object of the proposed fund; he felt that the only aim of such agitation was to influence an alien government and had no real connexion with the welfare of the country. This policy of 'begging favours from the white masters' could only foster an infantile mentality of irresponsible criticism and a spirit of parasitic dependence on others. He distrusted rights which could be conferred or withdrawn at the sweet pleasure of the rulers He realised that the use of English as the sole language of political work effectually isolated such work from the people; he urged that a vigorous attempt be made to awaken the mind of the masses by spreading education, and to create a spirit of self-reliance by initiating welfare work by our own efforts. The patriotic songs of this period are inspired by the same spirit of independence; in one the Poet implored his countrymen to throw away 'the salver of petitions and memorials.'

The appeal of a wider humanism was not lacking in the writings of this period. At the age of twenty, Rabindranath made an angry protest against the forcing of opium on the Chinese in an article, *The Traffic of Death in China* (1881). In another essay he said: The call of humanity is ever sounding. Have we nothing of permanent value to contribute to the future of human civilization? He pointed out that

true freedom consists in subordinating selfish interests to the universal spirit of humanity, while isolation, even in independence, was bondage. In the *Song of Invitation* (1885) he called upon Bengal to take her place in the world of humanity. At the same time he made clear his dislike of a nebulous cosmopolitanism. In an essay on *A Plot of Land* (1884), he said : The universe is present in each and every small holding. To be able to know truly even a small plot of land is the only way of realizing the Universe. In an essay on *Ram Mohun Roy* (1884), he pointed out that the significance of a people lay in the individuality of its contribution to sum of human culture.

III

In 1891 Rabindranath took charge of the Tagore estates in North Bengal and went to Shileida, where he stayed for several years. He came into intimate contact with 'the poor, patient, submissive, family-loving, home-clinging, eternally exploited ryots of Bengal,' and gained a deep insight into their everyday life and needs. His passionate preoccupation in village welfare work which is such a marked feature of his latter day activities may be said to be a direct resultant of his stay among the peasants. He wrote at this time :

> I feel a great tenderness for the peasant folk—our ryots—big, helpless, infantile children of providence. I know not whether the socialistic ideal of a more equal distribution of wealth is attainable, but, if not, then such dispensation of Providence is indeed cruel, and man a truly unfortunate creature. For if in this world misery must exist, so be it; but let some little loophole, some glimpses of possibility, at least, be left, which may serve to urge the nobler portion of humanity to hope and struggle unceasingly for its alleviation. . . . If there be any undercurrent along which the souls of men may have communication with one another then my sincere blessing will surely reach and serve them.

The relation between the rulers and the people increasingly engaged his attention at this time. In an essay on *Englishmen and Indians* (1893) he pointed out the lack of human touch in the British administration of India. The British rule was terribly efficient, but was purely mechanical and thoroughly impersonal. The rulers need never come into any personal contact with the people; they might help or hinder their aspiration but only from a disdainful distance. And what was a matter of mere policy to the rulers might pierce into the very core of life, might threaten the whole future

of the governed but never touch the chord of humanity. This was his greatest condemnation of British rule in India.

In a large number of short notes and comments (1893-98) he showed how this mechanical administration was creating in the bureaucracy a mentality which looked upon the subject people as less than human, in dealings with whom the human code of honour and morality could be abrogated. It weakened the moral sense of the white man, and debased the humanity of the rulers as well as that of the governed. In *Remedy to Insults* and in *Digestion of Whipping* (1896) he suggested that the best interests of both Englishmen and Indians demanded that the former should be taught the lesson that the latter could not be insulted with impunity. The lynching of Negroes in the United States, the pogrom against Jews in Russia, or the atrocities in Belgian Congo did not escape his attention and called forth strong condemnation (1898).

At the same time, he grew more and more dissatisfied with the activities of politicians which had protests as their sole aim, and proposed that the Indian National Congress, instead of passing resolutions for the benefit of Government, should take up a definite programme of constructive work in the country. The problem of education thus began to loom large in his mind. In *The Tortuosities of Education* (1892) he vigorously advocated making Bengali the medium of instruction and emphasized the need for making education fit in with the life of the people.

Amidst the growing perplexities of social, educational and political problems, his mind slowly turned to the past in an endeavour to discover in the history of India a central ideal for regulating our life and work. In 1895 we find a small group of poems: *Brahman* (in *Chitra*), *To Civilization*, *Forests*, *Forest-homes*, *Ancient India* (all in *Chaitali*) in which the mind of the poet was evidently captivated by the Message of the Forest.

> The forest, unlike the desert or rock or sea, is living; it gives shelter and nourishment of life. In such surroundings the ancient forest-dwellers of India realized the spirit of harmony with the universe and emphasized in their minds the monistic aspects of truth. They sought the realisation of their soul through union with all.

Shortly after this we have a series of studies in which Rabindranath emphasized that the history of India had not merely been one of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy.

The history of our people was that of our social life and the pursuit of spiritual ideals.

He contrasted the political civilization of the West which is based on exclusiveness with the social civilization of India which is based on human relationship and co-operation.

The Nation is the organized self-interest of a people where it is least human and least spiritual. The spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in the centre of Western nationalism: its basis is not in social co-operation. It has evolved a perfect organization of power, but not of spiritual idealism.

He rejected the cult of nationalism very decisively, and in a series of essays and sermons (1898-1902) expounded the ideals of the social civilization which he considered to be the most valuable contribution of India. It was the peculiar gift of India to invest even utilitarian relations with human value. The ideal of Indian civilization was the unitary society which was maintained through the social regulation of differences on one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity on the other. Rabindranath rejoiced in the fact that when Asoka was the Emperor of India, he sent messengers of peace and universal love, instead of conquering armies, to the different countries of the world. The Poet found the truth of India in the spiritual message of the Upanishads and of the Buddha.

The *Naivedya* poems of this period (1900-1) are permeated by an austere spiritual idealism. At the close of the 19th century, just before the outbreak of the South African War, he wrote with almost prophetic vision :

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood red clouds of the West and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of greed is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.

He knew that this was not the way of India :

Keep watch, India.
Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the proud and the powerful.
Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul.
And know that what is huge is not great, and pride is not everlasting.

Rabindranath reminded his countrymen again and again :

With the help of unrighteousness men do prosper.
With the help of unrighteousness men do gain victories over their enemies.
With the help of unrighteousness men do attain what they desire.
But they perish at the root.

In order to give concrete form to his ideas he left Shileida and started the *Brahma-Vidyalaya* (as the school used to be called at that time) at Santiniketan in December, 1901, on the model of the forest-hermitages of ancient India. Rabindranath sent his invitation in the name of the one who was *Santam Sivam Advaitam* :

The Peaceful, in the heart of all conflicts; the Good, who is revealed through all losses and sufferings; the One, in all diversities of creation.

IV

In 1904 the Swadeshi movement broke in tumult all over Bengal. To Rabindranath it came as a splendid opportunity for initiating a great movement for constructive work of which he had been dreaming so long : We must look after our own interest, carry out our own work, earn our own welfare, do everything ourselves.

Of our impoverished and helpless villages he said : It will not do merely to remove wants ; you can never remove them completely ; the far greater thing is to rouse the will of the people to remove their own wants.

He gave a complete scheme of constructive work in the presidential address to the Provincial Congress at Pabna (1907), and suggested that our young men should form themselves into bands of workers who would go round the villages ; give a new orientation to the village fairs (*melas*), bring together Hindus and Muslims in fruitful work ; confer with and help the villagers in starting schools, making roads, supplying drinking water and the like ; devise other ways and means in regard to all matters of general interest. In his address to the students (1905) he said :

The down-trodden and the despised who have become callous to insults and oblivious of even the rights of their humanity must be taught the meaning of the word brother. Teach them to be strong and to protect themselves; for that is the only way. Take, each of you, charge of some village and organize it. Educate the villagers and show them how to put forward their united strength. Look not for fame or praise in this undertaking. Do not expect even the gratitude of those for whom you would give your life, but be prepared rather for their opposition

His sympathy for the lowly and the despised has also found expression in his poems, for example, in the *Gitanjali* in *My unfortunate land, you must come down in humiliation to the level of those whom you have despised.*

Rabindranath threw himself heart and soul into the agitation

against the Partition of Bengal.* He gave lectures, wrote articles, composed a large number of songs such as *'My Golden Bengal,' 'From the heart of Bengal, you have arisen in your glory, my Mother,'* whose central theme was Bengal and which created a patriotic fervour never known before. He spread the use of the handloom, experimented with the *charka*, and actively participated in the organization of co-operative societies and cottage industries. It is interesting to note that in *Leader of the Country* (1905), he proposed that a single individual should be invested with full powers of leadership. In his opinion such a step would consolidate the discipline of the people in a personal allegiance to an individual man.

In his writings of this period he made it clear that he considered it a moral duty to fight evil. In fact, although he has no faith in force or violence, he has never given non-violence the status of a cult. His position in this respect is more akin to that of the *Gita*. For example, in an article written in 1903, he thought it right, under certain circumstances, to have recourse to force, provided this could be done without hatred or anger.

Throughout the Swadeshi movement his mind remained essentially creative and positive. In one of his letters we find :

> I remember the day, during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal when a crowd of young students came to see me and said that if I would ask them to leave their schools and colleges, they would instantly obey. I was emphatic in my refusal to do so, and they went away angry, doubting the sincerity of my love for my country.

This incident took place in the midst of his activities in connexion with the Bengal National Council of Education, which had been set up as an independent organization in opposition to the University of Calcutta. He was one of its founders, and he worked hard in its cause, made plans, raised money, gave courses of lectures to the students, but was not prepared to support a merely destructive boycott of the official university.

Politics was always a secondary thing with him. His views on the function of the Congress are significant. He said that even if all the political aims of the Congress failed completely, the Congress would still serve a most useful purpose if it succeeded in bringing the different provinces of India into closer personal contact. At the height of the

* In 1904 it was decided by Government to divide East and West Bengal into separate administrative provinces

Swadeshi movement he declared that the ultimate object of political work was to mould the mind of the people into one.

In the midst of his activities, as the excitement and the heat of the movement increased, Rabindranath suddenly retired to Santiniketan. The Hindu-Muslim problem and the clash of varying interests in India continued, however, to trouble his mind. In his novel *Goru* (1907-09) he laid more and more emphasis on the unifying principle which manifested itself throughout the whole course of the history of India :

> To India has been given her problem from the beginning of history—it is the race problem. Races ethnologically different have in this country come into close contact. This fact has been and still continues to be the most important one in our history. It is our mission to face it and prove our humanity by dealing with it in fullest truth. We have to recognize that the history of India does not belong to one particular race but to a process of creation to which the various races of the world have contributed— Dravidians and Aryans, the ancient Greeks and the Persians, the Mahomedans of the West and those of Central Asia.

Just at this time violence made its first appearance in Indian politics. In an important essay on *The Way and its Fare* (1908), Rabindranath tried to stem the impatience which sought quick results through violence. He opposed recourse to violence, not by an appeal to an abstract moral maxim, but on the ground that it violated the truth and ultimate purpose of the history of India.

In the same essay he insisted upon the need for toleration in the face of opposition, and advised the lifting of the ban on British goods on the ground that the boycott movement was accentuating Hindu-Muslim differences and was encouraging race hatred. He described the conflict of ideals of this period at a later date in the novel *The Home and the World* (1915-16).

In *East and West* (1908) he said : In India, the history of humanity is seeking to achieve a definite synthesis. The history of India is not the history of Aryans or non-Aryans ; it is not the history of the Hindus, nor that of only Hindus and Musalmans taken together. He declared :

> Now at last has come the turn of the English to become true to this history and bring to it the tribute of their life, and we neither have the right nor the power to exclude this people from the building of the destiny of India.

His vision of the meeting of Humanity in India was now complete. It found magnificent expression in two *Gitanjali* poems (1910) begin-

ning with, *'I see before my eyes the rolling clouds of humanity,* and *'On the sacred shores of the ocean of humanity of this India Awoke my heart.*

V

The award of the Nobel prize in 1913 gave him the opportunity of establishing personal contacts with the different countries of the world. During the Great War he joined the intellectuals of the world in issuing a manifesto against war. In 1916 he toured in Japan and America, and delivered the well-known lectures on *Nationalism* which contain his indictment of the modern nations which had become organized as machinery of rapine and destruction. The contrast between the aggressive spirit of the modern West and the peaceful ideals of the ancient East becomes increasingly vivid. When he returned to his own country his thoughts naturally turned to the heritage of ancient India. He felt the need for an institution which would be a true centre of human culture.

In 1918 in his lectures on *The Centre of Indian Culture* he faced the two stupendous problems of India : the poverty of intellectual life and the poverty of material life. He proposed to start an institution which would be a centre of Indian learning for the co-ordinated study of the philosophy and literature, art and music of the various cultural streams of India : the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jaina, the Islamic, the Sikh, and the Zoroastrian ; to which would be gradually added the Chinese, the Tibetan and the Japanese. This institution would also be a centre of the economic life of India.

> It must cultivate land, breed cattle, feed itself and its students; it must produce all necessaries, devising the best means and using the best materials, calling science to its aid. Such an institution must group round it all the neighbouring villages, and vitally unite them with itself in all its economic endeavours.

The Poet coined the word 'Visva-Bharati' at this time ; *Visva* in Sanskrit means the world in its universal aspect ; *Bharati* is wisdom and culture.* The Visva-bharati was to be the centre of learning for the whole world. Appropriately enough the following Sanskrit text was selected as the motto of the Visva-bharati :

Yatra Viśvam bhavati eka-nīḍam :

'Where the whole world forms its one single nest.'

* There is an allusion to India (*Bharata*) in the word *Bharati*, which thus also represents the Spirit of India.

Since the days of the Swadeshi movement Rabindranath had kept himself aloof from political activities, devoting his energies to his institution at Santiniketan. In 1919, the Jallianwalla Bagh incident, however, brought him into a momentary contact with the political life of the country. He renounced his knighthood, "taking all consequences upon himself in giving voice to the protest of millions of his countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. It was a protest recorded in the name of humanity, not in the hope of gaining concessions or to make political capital out of it. This was made clear by his emphatic refusal to support the movement for erecting a memorial at Jallianwalla Bagh.

After the end of the Great War, Rabindranath undertook a long tour in 1920-21 in Europe and the United States. He spoke everywhere on the need of the meeting of East and West in a common fellowship of learning and a common spiritual striving for the unity of the human races.

Western science was destined, through the mastery of the laws of nature, to liberate man from the bondage of matter. This was not all. Rabindranath was convinced that the West owed its greatness not only to its marvellous training of intellect and its readiness to suffer martyrdom for the cause of justice and truth but to its spirit of service devoted to the welfare of man. In his appeal to the people of the West, he said :

> The world to-day is offered to the West. She will destroy it if she does not use it for a great creation of man. The materials for such a creation are in the hands of science, but the creative genius is in Man's spiritual ideal.

When he returned to India in 1921, the non-co-operation movement was at its highest. Although great pressure was put upon him from all sides, he steadfastly refused to join it. He was unable to accept the claim of a spiritual movement made in its behalf. He thus explained his position in a letter :

> I believe in the efficacy of *ahimsa* (non-violence) as the means to overcome the congregated might of physical force on which the political powers in all countries mainly rest. But the great personalities of the world have preached love, forgiveness and non-violence, primarily for the sake of spiritual perfection and not for the attainment of some immediate success in politics.

He could never agree to isolating India from the stream of world thought and progress. In the midst of an unprecedented political unrest and excitement, and against the whole force of the current of

popular sentiment, he expounded his own views with great courage in two lectures, *The Call of Truth* and *The Meeting of Cultures* (1921). He said :

It is a fact of unique importance in the history of the world to-day, that the human races have come together as they had never done before.... The mentality of the world has to be changed in order to meet the new environment of the modern age. Just as, hitherto, the collective egoism of the Nation has been cultivated in our schools, and has given rise to a nationalism which is vainglorious and exclusive, even so will it be necessary now to establish a new education on the basis not of nationalism, but of a wider relationship of humanity.

It has been said in our scriptures: *atithih devo bhava*, asking us to realize that the Divine comes to us as our guest, claiming our homage. All that is great and true in humanity is ever waiting at our gate to be invited. It is not for us to question it about the country to which it belongs, but to receive it in our home and bring before it the best we have.

Our wealth is truly proved by our ability to give, and Visva bharati is to prove this on behalf of India. Our mission is to show that we have a place in the heart of the great world: that we fully acknowledge our obligation of offering it our hospitality.

Rabindranath founded the Visva-bharati in December, 1921, and proclaimed that Visva-bharati was India's invitation to the world, her offer of sacrifice to the highest truth of man.

VI

Since then he has carried the message of the Visva-bharati far and wide. In 1924 he visited China. In his address to his hosts, he reminded them of those days when India sent her messengers of peace and universal love who found their unity of heart with the people of China. The poet hoped that the old relationship was still there, hidden in the heart of the people of the East, and his visit would reopen the channel of communication. Asia must seek strength in union, but not in competition with the West in selfishness or brutality.

The West is becoming demoralised through being the exploiter. We must fight with our faith in the moral and spiritual power of man.... Machine guns and bomb-dropping aeroplanes crush living men under them, and the West is sinking to its dust.

In the autumn of the same year he went to South America at the invitation of Peru on the occasion of the Centenary of its independence, and visited Italy on his way back.

The growing strength of the cult of power with its increasing

tendency towards the mechanization of institutions and the repression of personality stirred the poet deeply. He gave voice to his protest in a number of lectures and essays, and also indirectly in two dramas of this period, *Waterfall* (1922) and *Red Oleanders* (1924).

The possibilities of acquiring money have increased tremendously in modern times. Production has assumed gigantic dimensions. This has led to an enormous number of men being used merely as material; so that human relationships have become utilitarian and men have been deprived of a large part of their humanity. Modern society has lost its integrity; its different sections have become detached and resolved into their elemental character of forces. Labour is a force; so also is Capital; so are the Government and the People. The repressed personality of man is smouldering in the subconscious mind of the community, and has created a dangerous situation. Faced with the possibility of a disaster, the great Powers of the West are seeking for peace by concentrating their forces for mutual security. The Poet warned them, however, that the conflict of selfish interests was bound to grow more and more acute so long as their League was based on the desire for consolidating past injustice and putting off the reparation of wrongs.

Rabindranath does not believe in systems or organizations. All systems produce evil sooner or later, when the psychology which is at the root of them goes wrong :

> Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth.

In 1926 he again went to Europe and received a great welcome in Italy as an honoured guest. He was favourably impressed by the material prosperity of the country, but inspite of his delicate position in having accepted her hospitality he was unable to accord his approval to a political ideal which had declared its loyalty to brute force as the motive power of civilization.

He made an extensive tour in the countries of Western and Central Europe, and visited the Balkan States, Turkey and Egypt. In *The Rule of the Giant* (1926), one of the lectures delivered during this tour, he described the suppression of the human personality as the parent ill of the present age. He admitted the need for having organizations. These help to simplify the application of energy for attaining our purpose. They are our tools. But if this fact is for-

gotten, and huge and hungry organizations are allowed to overwhelm the individual man, then the life stuff of humanity will be eaten up. The only remedy was to restore the value of personality in human civilization.

I believe in life, only when it is progressive ; and in progress, only when it is in harmony with life. I preach the freedom of man from the servitude of the fetish of hugeness, the non-human. I refuse to be styled an enemy of enlightenment, because I do stand on the side of Jack the human, who defies the big, the gross, and wins victory at the end.

In 1927 Rabindranath visited the Malay States, Java, Bali, and Siam, and revived the ancient bond of India with these countries, which at one time were culturally integral parts of India. In 1929 he attended the Triennial Conference of the National Council of Education of Canada. He was the outstanding figure at the Conference, and he roused a wonderful enthusiasm wherever he went. The welcome given to him gradually became not only a personal homage to his greatness but also a testimony of good will from Canada to India itself. On his way home to India from Canada, he visited Indo-China. In 1930, in his seventieth year, he again undertook an extensive tour in the West, visiting England, France, Germany, Denmark, Russia and the United States.

The visit to Russia created a deep impression on his mind, and his *Letters from Russia* (1930-31) give a remarkable picture of the Soviet experiments in State Socialism. On the eve of his departure from Moscow he said :

I wish to let you know how deeply I have been impressed by the amazing intensity of your energy in spreading education among the masses; I appreciate it all the more keenly because I belong to that country where millions of my fellow countrymen are denied the light that education can bring them. You have recognized the truth that in extirpating all social evils one has to go to the root, which can only be done through education.

But he remained a convinced individualist. In his farewell message he told his hosts :

I must ask you : Are you doing your ideal a service by arousing in the minds of those under your training, anger, class hatred and revengefulness against those not sharing your views ? You are working in a great cause. Therefore you must be great in your mind, great in your mercy, your understanding, and your patience.

There must be disagreement where minds are allowed to be free. It would not only be an uninteresting but a sterile world of mechanical regularity if all our opinions are forcibly made alike. If you have a mission which

includes all humanity, you must for the sake of the living humanity, acknowledge the existence of differences of opinion. Freedom of mind is needed for the reception of truth..

VII

The humanism of Rabindranath Tagore has its deeper source of inspiration in his Religion of Man which is the highest expression of his own spiritual experience.

The universe has significance only in terms of human values. Beauty has no existence apart from the appreciation of man. All values have their origin in the mind of man. Even the truth of science is reached through the process of observation and reasoning which is human ; its value as truth being a creation of the human mind. Science can only deal with such facts as man can know and understand, and the Absolute which is beyond the intellect of man can never be the subject matter of scientific investigation. The nature of the universe does not, however, depend upon the comprehension of the individual persons. There exists a universal mind of humanity which transcends separate individual persons, and has an integrity of its own which is something more than the sum of its components. It endures beyond the life of the individual person. It is super-individual, it is the Universal Mind. The truth of science receives its validity by reference to the standards of judgment of this Universal Mind. Truth thus has its existence in the Universal Mind, and is independent of the comprehension of the peculiarities of individual minds which are limited in space and time.

It is not merely a reasoning mind. It is also the ultimate ground of all other values. It is the Supreme Personality : "The God of this human universe whose mind we share in all true knowledge, love and service."

It is the Eternal Person manifested in all persons. It may be only one aspect of *Brahman*, the One in whom is comprehended Man and the Human Universe. But this is the only aspect in which he can reveal himself to human beings.

He is the infinite ideal of Man, towards whom men move in their collective growth, with whom they seek their union of love as individuals, in whom they find their ideal of father, friend, and beloved.

For Rabindranath this is not an abstract philosophical system ; it is a matter of direct spiritual realization. In his *Hibbert Lectures*

(1930-31) he has described his first experiences when he was working in the Tagore estates :

On that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth. I felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences. To this Being I was responsible; for the creation in me is his as well as mine. I felt that I had found my religion at last, the Religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation.

This idea found expression in the group of poems addressed to *Jivan devata*, the Lord of Life. 'The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal' was the one theme which unfolded itself through all his religious experiences. Speaking of the time of starting the Santiniketan school, he said :

I am sure that it was this idea of the divine Humanity unconsciously working in my mind, which compelled me to come out of the seclusion of my literary career and take my part in the world of practical activities.

The meeting of humanity now receives a new significance. It is the acknowledgment of the spiritual kinship of man which is universal. Rabindranath has said :

So long men had been cultivating, almost with religious fervour, that mentality which is the product of racial isolation; poets proclaimed, in a loud pitch of bragging, the exploits of their popular fighters; money-makers felt neither pity nor shame in the unscrupulous dexterity of their pocket-picking; diplomats scattered lies in order to reap concessions from the devastated future of their own victims. Suddenly the walls that separated the different races are seen to have given way, and we find ourselves face to face.

And thus to all men:

The God of humanity has arrived at the gates of the ruined temple of the tribe. Though he has not yet found his altar, I ask the men of simple faith, wherever they may be in the world, to bring their offering of sacrifice to him. I ask them to claim the right of manhood to be friends of men.

I ask once again, let us, the dreamers of the East and the West, keep our faith firm in the Life that creates and not in the Machine that constructs.

ya eko' varno bahudha śakti-yogāt
varṇān anekān nihitārtho dadhāti ;
viśaiti cānte viśvam ādau sa devaḥ,
so no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu:

He who is One, and who dispenses the inherent needs of all peoples and all times, who is in the beginning and the end of all things, may He unite us with the bond of truth, of common fellowship, of righteousness.