

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S MESSAGE TO INDIA.

STUDENTS of what Swami Vivekananda has left us mainly in the form of his speeches may easily classify the same under two broad divisions, namely : his message to the world and his message to India. It is mainly again from the speeches delivered by him in India and published as "Lectures from Colombo to Almora" that his message to India stands out in bold relief.

It was in the fitness of things that in Swami Vivekananda a divine messenger was given to India in modern times. The Swami loved his country from his boyhood and it was a love such as only a heart like his, quite an ocean in its depth and sweep, was capable of. Such patriotism can never be the outcome of any training; it is inborn. Such perfect identification of self with country can be accounted for only when we understand how in the birth of a Vivekananda, the very soul of his country finds itself bodied forth. In the episode of such a life, the achievement, the promise, the hope and the mission of a whole country become reflected and epitomised, and Swami Vivekananda may well be said to have carried and embodied within himself from his birth the collective Indian consciousness. So it was really through Norendra, when sitting at his feet, that his Master got hold of the whole of India and through India the whole of mankind.

In his Master again, Norendra found the India of his heart interpreting herself. All his college study in history, all his participation in public life, had never conjured up in his mind a vision of India so real, so brilliant, so glorious as that which shone forth through his Master. Oh! here was India seated in all her glory, the Mother of religions. Here through this wonderful drama of his Master's life, she was recounting and generalising her

past experiences and achievements such as only and really counted with her through centuries and centuries of surface-waves on Time which we call history. Here India was recording in living, tangible, indelible characters her real history in the past and her destined role in the future. This vision smote Norendra's soul with the fire of prophecy and henceforth the consciousness grew in him that he had a message to bear to India and also to mankind on her behalf. And we all know how as the necessary outfit, the divine messenger obtained, along with his high commission, the highest and heartiest gift which Mother India makes to her son, the gift of the Vedic salvation.

The vision of India deepened in colour and expression before the mind of Swami Vivekananda through all the years of travel over his country and the impulse to serve and worship her deepened as well. During these travels as an itinerant monk, the sights of distress, misery and ignorance tapped the deepest springs in his heart of love and sympathy for the Indian masses and the realisation of God as manifested in his fellow-creatures came to him with a force that spurred on the mightiest impulses for service. Oh! for a proper opening to be vouchsafed to him now that he might set to work for his beloved people. His whole soul was burning with anguish and impatience when he received the call to go over to the West. And in one of his speeches at Madras after his first return from the West, after defining in those ever-memorable words his own ideal of patriotism, he declared: "I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no

way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America."

We have seen above that the very first step in this great preparation of one who was to be the truest messenger from on High to his country was a direct acquaintance with and acquisition of the spirituality and wisdom which India stands for in this world and which define and interpret her mission and life-history. The second step was a wonderful widening of the heart and quickening of the noblest impulses, and the third step would be a clear understanding and discrimination of the methods, the ways and means. This last step Swami Vivekananda was enabled to take through his direct experience of the world, its many nations and their peculiarities of thought and action.

So after all this thorough preparation, when on the 15th of January 1897, Swami Vivekananda landed in Colombo and stood before his countrymen, the hero of the Chicago Parliament and the greatest modern prophet from India to the world outside, the time was full when his message to his country was to be unburdened. And in speech after speech, informed with nothing short of divine inspiration and unparalleled in their depth and earnestness of thought and expression, the message went forth from that "orator by divine right," ringing clear and straight to the dormant hearts of his countrymen. Let us now briefly describe this message.

In his reply to the address given him in Calcutta, the Swami points out that the advent of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa into this world happened just in time to avert a great danger to his country, even the danger of annihilation. He said: "Each nation has its own peculiar method of work. Some work through politics, some through social reforms, some through other lines. With us religion is the only ground along which we can move. The Englishman can understand religion even through politics. Perhaps the American

can understand religion even through social reforms. But the Hindu can understand even politics when it is given through religion; sociology must come through religion, everything must come through religion. For that is the theme, the rest are the variations in the national life-music. And that was in danger. It seemed that we were going to change this theme in our national life, that we were going to exchange the backbone of our existence, as it were, that we were trying to replace a spiritual by a political backbone. And if we could have succeeded, the result would have been annihilation. But it was not to be. So this power became manifest." This was the groundwork of faith on which the Swami's message took its stand. It was not a proposal or theory put forward for favour of his country's acceptance. It was verily a question of life and death for his country whether it should accept or not his message; and he knew in his heart that his message was bound to be accepted one day, for was that not a part of the same divine economy by which such a tremendous manifestation of power as we find in his Master was effected to grant his country a new lease of life?

The central idea in his message is that there is a fundamental difference between India and other countries and that this difference must have to be first understood and recognised in its fullest significance, before any Indian problem can be viewed by us in its true perspective. The Swamiji was never tired of pointing out this difference in a thousand and one different ways of expression and almost in every lecture it was re-iterated. To avoid multiplying quotations, let us try to explain this central idea as expressed in the passage we have cited from his reply to the Calcutta Address.

Here in this quotation, religion is called the backbone of our existence. The backbone is the main support in the bodily structure of every vertebrate, from which all other organs

and limbs are supported and energised. So in the Indian collective life, religion is the source and support of all the other human concerns and activities. Religion here means the practice of the Indian Spiritual Ideal, so all-inclusive and synthetic in its scope and so transcendental in its depth. It is the mission of India in this world to cultivate, preserve and diffuse this Spiritual Ideal. This is the supreme end of our collective existence, and all other ends in that life bear to this supreme end, as we have said before, the relation of limbs to the backbone in physical structure, that is to say, they grow out of it, are energised by it and are ultimately conducive to it. Let us illustrate this.

Take politics; and we have the statement of Swamiji that "the Hindu can understand even politics when it is given through religion." Can we accept politics to be a department of our collective life and activity? Yes, provided, in the first place, it grows out of our collective pursuit of the spiritual mission as defined above. In the earliest Vedic ages, this was exactly the case and the kingly or Kshatriya class grew out of the necessity of protecting the religious pursuits. The ancient lawgivers also attached this kind of significance to the political State. But with the inevitable increase of power, the Kshatriyas would tend to outdo their legitimate functions to the detriment of the spiritual economy of the Aryan society. As a result, we find in those ancient times that society had to tackle again and again the hard problem of curbing the Kshatriya power, till in the Kurukshetra a sad destruction of the ancient Kshatriya classes took place. After that mighty milestone in Indian history, amidst incessant political confusion everywhere, the tendency to make the collective life in the country as much independent of the functions of a political State as possible, began to grow, and as an outcome of this tendency, the wonderful economy of village communities became prevalent throughout

India. Since then, the ancient race has been silently pursuing the even tenour of their life and mission behind all the huge political events that shook the country from one end to the other. Big empires and kingdoms have heaved up their proud heads and then toppled down, conquering legions have thundered past by, but the Indian village-folks have noiselessly preserved on, although amidst a steady decline of their material prosperity, that spiritual scheme of life and civilisation which the makers of Vedic India transmitted to posterity. Centuries of such independent pursuit of their spiritual mission, have created in the race a wonderful capacity for self-reliance and self-adaptability.

But with the advent of the British rule and Western culture, a new order of things has been introducing itself. Village life all over India is being shattered to pieces and old ideals and methods of life are fast disappearing. The classes having cut themselves adrift from their ancient moorings in the village life, and the masses consequently being thrown back upon their own moral and intellectual resources and economic makeshifts, a terrible disorganisation in collective life has ensued. To this festering disorganisation are due many of those sufferings of our people which are generally put forward as our political grievances. Western culture again has set up amongst educated men an imitation of Western political pursuits, and a political outlook for collective life has been created before their mind's eye. Needless to say that these political pursuits and views are antagonistic to the Spiritual Ideal which we have got to realise through our collective life, for they are fruitlessly diverting our energies. As we have said before, politics to be such as we can accept as a department of our collective activity must have to grow out of the necessities of our collective spiritual pursuits. Our present-day political activities do not satisfy this condition. Why should we fret and fume and pine away for self-

government of this type or that? The spiritual mission of India on the basis of which we have got to rebuild our collective life does not involve as a *necessary* factor either the cherishing in our mind or fulfilling any such political ambition. Does it not quite suffice for all the essential purposes of the collective life we have got to build up, if the political State now established in the country so administers its affairs that the pursuit of our collective life and ideal is not hampered in any way? And does it not quite suffice for our purpose if the privilege of such political co-operation is not denied to us by the State as would render it possible for safeguards being put against such obstruction or hampering? Scarcely any political State established in our country during the foregoing centuries of political confusion pledged itself to a policy of religious neutrality in the way that the present one does, and this fact appears to be of the utmost value when we remember that in the present age we have to work out collectively a harmony of all the prevalent religions in the country on a practical workable basis. Besides this, the advent of a Western nation as political administrators in the country has been instrumental, within a short period and on a scale otherwise impossible, in opening our eyes to new scientific methods and facilities for organising a collective life,—the pressing task that lies before us, though a singular one in respect of its spiritual end and motive force.

* The place of politics in the collective life that we are called upon to organise in the present age has been dealt with at some length, because it is the pursuit of politics specially from which Swami Vivekananda sought to call away his countrymen. With him it was not certainly a case of calling the grapes sour; he knew fully well how the part that politics plays in the life of Western nations is of paramount importance. But

India is India; you cannot alter now the whole course of her life-history,—neither the trend of her thought and culture for centuries, nor the divine mission on which she hinged her social fabric thousands of years ago. So if we want to save our energies from utter waste, if we want to protect and deepen all our new-born enthusiasm for collective and organised activity, if we want in fact to avert ultimately the death that surely lies through our infatuated imitation of Western processes of collective life, we must at once cry halt in our frenzied march towards political aims and set seriously to work with the spiritual mission of India as our basis.

Like politics, social reform must also grow out of the necessities of our collective pursuit of the spiritual end. Reforms in a society to be useful and salutary must follow lines along which that society has evolved from the beginning. Setting aside the catchwords and prepossessions derived from Western sociology, if we study with patience and with an open mind the evolution of society in ancient India, we are sure to find social customs gradually evolving out of the demands and necessities of Vedic religious pursuits, and social distinctions set up and based on the comparative subserviency of individuals or classes to the collective spiritual end. If we want to make the same principle operative now, in order that progressive changes in society may be worked out, we must first set society in motion towards the collective spiritual end, in other words, we must collectively move towards this spiritual end. This is what Swamiji meant when he said that "Sociology must come through religion." In the same way, "Everything must come through religion"; for all the wheels in a factory have the chance of moving and doing their work, only if the prime mover is first set in motion. So if collective life in India begins to grow on the basis of her spiritual end and mission, social reform, industrial reform,

economic reform,—progress in every department that is to say—are bound to proceed on healthy lines and along their proper orbit.

But the growth of a collective life in India on the spiritual basis implies, first of all, a harmony worked out among the different religions, and such harmonisation or unification the Swamiji in his lecture on "The Future of India" calls "the first plank in the making of a future India." Mere intellectual recognition of unity in the different creeds would never supply the cementing force in this great initial step in the work of building up a collective life in India; we must have some supreme practical demonstration of this unity-in-difference held up before us to rally round and such a demonstration has been vouchsafed to us in the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. So if we accept Swami Vivekananda's message, we cannot avoid accepting his prophetic advice, couched with so much emphasis in the following words, which also we quote from his reply to the Calcutta Address and with which we conclude.

"The highest ideal in our scriptures is the Impersonal and would to God every one of us here were high enough to realise that Impersonal ideal; but, as that cannot be, it is absolutely necessary for the vast majority of human beings to have a personal ideal; and no nation can rise, can become great, can work at all, without enthusiastically coming under the banner of one of these great ideals in life. Political ideals, personages representing political ideals, even social ideals, commercial ideals, would have no power in India. We want spiritual ideals before us, we want enthusiastically to gather round grand spiritual names. Our heroes must be spiritual. Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round this name."

EPISTLES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

XIII.

C/o George W. Hale,
541 Dearborn Avenue, Chicago,
26th June, 1894

Dear—

The great Hindi poet Tulsidas, in his benediction to the translation of the Ramayana says, "I bow down to both the wicked and holy, but alas! for me, they are both equally torturers—the wicked begin to torture me as soon as they come in contact with me—the good, alas! take my life away when they leave me."

I say amen to this. To me, for whom the only thing left in the world is to love the holy ones of God, it is a mortal torture to separate myself from them. But these things must come. Thou Music of my Beloved's flute, lead on, I am following. It is impossible to express my pain, my anguish at being separated from you, noble and sweet and generous and holy ones. Oh! how I wish I had succeeded in becoming a Stoic!

Hope you are enjoying the beautiful village scenery. "Where the world is awake, there the man of self-control is sleeping. Where the world sleeps, there he is waking."

May even the dust of the world never touch you, for after all the poets say, it is only a piece of carrion covered over with garlands. Touch it not—if you can. Come up, young ones of the bird* of Paradise, be-

* The Swami rather means here the "Hoomo" bird of Bengalee folklore, which is fabled to live exclusively in the atmosphere and whose eggs, laid high up in the air, are hatched during the steep fall towards the ground, so that the young ones, who fly upwards the very moment, have never to touch the earth. Sri Ramakrishna used to compare the Nitya-siddhas or the eternally liberated souls to