

A DEEPER ASPECT OF THE PRESENT EUROPEAN SITUATION

WHEN, a few months ago, I stood on one of the highest points of the Alps and over looked the snow-clad ranges spreading before my wondering eyes, for miles and miles, without a speck of a stain on them, and the setting sun was steeping the distant mountain tops into a most delicate hue of pink, with the deep blue sky as clear above: then I realised again what peace was and how one could not help feeling the presence of the Eternal in this ideal state of unspoilt Nature. But then I returned to the cities of men, other sights met my eye and other thoughts overwhelmed my brain and brought out to me the terrible disharmony between life as it was and life as it ought to be: for here there was unrest and not peace, misery and not happiness, discontentment and not joy. In one word, there was no sign of an ideal.

For it is ideas and ideals that make for happiness. Is Europe happy? No, decidedly no. Why not? Because of the lack of both. Its ideas are wrong, for they are compared by the visible horizon, by the care of the day, by material wants. Its ideals are missing: the War and after that the continuation of war in peace have crushed all idealism to the ground, and the present life is one of dull resignation into so-called circumstances. As if circumstances were the shapers of man's fate, and not vice-versa! Wherever idealism prevailed, sacrifices were made, sacrifices of material impulses, of wants and of desires to higher impulses, unselfish aims and aspirations. This Western world has forgotten to make sacrifices: for fear of losing what little it still possesses, it sacrifices the ideals to the satisfaction of immediate material wants. The great sacrifice is to give all so that one may gain all on a higher level; and unless this sacrifice is made in Europe, to renounce all that has happened before, to build up a new common state at the

sacrifice of the old treaties, in the place of ancient feuds, of bygone hatred and mutual distrust, no good will and no happiness can ever come out of the present situation. As Tagore has said somewhere: "Europe is not ready to give up her political inhumanity, with all the baser passions of man attendant upon it; she believes only in modification of systems, and not in change of heart." We need [a reconstruction and a reformation of the old system on new lines; new they seem at present and unheard of, because under the stress of the last eight years they have become obliterated, yet they are the old lines which have always been the guiding lines of all the reformers of mankind. This means, to work that the *mettā*, love, will enter the hearts of the Western world once more in its all-pervading power, and bring with it the *karunā*, compassion for all, the *upekhā*, equanimity, and the *muditā*, sympathy. —What a parody of ancient Christianity and what a paradox with simple and pure faith of the Buddha, as set forth in the venerable Pāli, the present civilisation appears. I quote Tagore once more: "The vital ambition of the present civilisation of Europe is to have the exclusive possession of the devil."

The present state of affairs seems to me to be ultimately due to two main errors of belief and conviction, psychologically understandable and founded in the lower nature of man. That is first the idea of retaliation which proclaims that an action must be met by a counter-action on the same level (or at least by "passive resistance"), that one wrong must be met by another wrong; and the other the impossibility of looking into the future, of gauging the relative importance only of the present, the incapability of judging the position of men and things "sub specie æternitatis," under the aspect of eternity. This appears as the main blindness of modern Europe; to have lost the wide view, which measures the fate of men and worlds by the drops of water forming the ocean and the grains of sand building up the mountains. Surely in all these centuries modern Europe should have acquired this view (as it had nearly

achieved in the eighteenth century), and it should have taught it its immense ethical value. It should have taught it that malice and hatred, and revenge are only productions of the moment and of wrongly directed impulses which have no place in the scheme of eternity and will never lead future generations to happiness. The effect of the narrow view is instantaneous misery of body and soul, and how can its effect on the future be good?

To apply with a few words these considerations to the political situation of the West, we find these the outstanding features. The political systems of Europe are guided by envy and ill-will. The character of this "policy" (when shall we be able to do away with this word?) is to the effect of keeping the nations in misery by the wrong idea of "do as you are done to." It ties them to the moment by virtue of its blindness to see farther than the moment, and it imbues them with the hunting spirit of fear instead of uplifting the hearts of the suffering millions into the sphere of confidence and hope.

Nowhere else may the effect of this Western intellectual and moral degeneration be seen more clearly than in the centre of Europe which bears the brunt of the evil consequences of the War: that is, in Germany. It is not the place here to give an account of the present state of this unfortunate country—which would fill books—it may be sufficient to point out a few outstanding features only.

The Rhine cities which contain the greatest master-pieces of Gothic art now lodge negroes who come from mud huts and against whom old women have found their old age no protection from assault. Young German women are taken for houses of prostitution to gratify their lusts. All over the country hope is fading more with every setting of the sun. The soul of the people is withering with despair. Suffering and agony are rife. New-born babes are wrapt in newspapers to keep them warm, and old people die from starvation, because the "Mark", the emblem of money and thus the standard of the "devil's

own" which determines the happiness of modern civilisation, has lost all purchasing power. People are in a constant nervous tension, unable to grasp the problems of the situation. An embittered nationalism is the standard of the rising generation, with, what Tagore calls "the tower of national selfishness, which goes by the name of patriotism" as their highest ideal. With certainty people are being driven into a revolution with counter-revolutions, which will bring back in their train the evils of militarism, and will destroy all hope of peace in Europe for a long time to come—unless something saves the situation.

Why should all this happen? It is not a disgrace to humanity, and does it not burn into the soul of any feeling individual with singleness of heart, with a fire, a thousand time fiercer than the fire of Hell? The answer to the problem is Karma, and the hope is Karma as well, with the confidence in Universal Love and the outlook for Universal Brotherhood.

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