

THE VOICE OF HUMANITY¹

BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE

[THIS is a speech made in Milan by the great Indian poet during his recent visit to Italy.]

My friends, I have been waiting for this moment. When Professor Formichi asked me to tell him what would be my subject this evening I said I did not know; for you must understand that I am not a speaker. I am nothing better than a poet. When I speak, I speak with my surroundings and not to my surroundings. Now that I see your kind faces, your silent voice has reached my heart, and my voice will blend with it. When the heart wishes to pay its debt it must have some coin with the stamp of its own realm upon it — and that is our mother tongue. But I do not know your beautiful language; neither do you know mine. Since, therefore, that medium cannot be used for the commerce of thought and sentiment between you and myself, I have reluctantly to use the English language, which is neither yours nor mine. Therefore at the outset I ask you to forgive me, — those of you who do not know this language, as also those of you who do, — because my English is a foreigner's English.

Now I know what I am going to speak to you about. It will be in answer to the question as to what was the urging that brought me to you across the sea. In our language we have the expression *jagrata de-*

vata, 'the Divinity which is fully awake.' For the soul of the individual the Divine is not everywhere and always active. Only where our consciousness is illumined with love does God act through our spirit. The shrine of the wakeful Divinity is there where the atmosphere of faith and devotion has been created by the meeting of generations of true worshippers. So our pilgrims in India are attracted to those places where, according to them, the Divine Spirit is active through the religious life and work of devotees.

Sometime in 1912 I felt such desire to make my pilgrimage to the shrine of humanity where the human mind was fully awake, with all its lamps lighted, there to meet face to face the Eternal in man. It had occurred to me that this present age was dominated by the European mind only because that mind was fully awake. You all know how the spirit of great Asia is going through an age-long slumber in the depth of the night, with only a few lonely watches to read the stars and wait for the sign of the rising sun across the darkness. So I had this longing to come to Europe and see the human spirit in the full blaze of its power and beauty. Then it was that I took that voyage, — my voyage of pilgrimage to Europe, — leaving for the moment my own work at Shantiniketan and the children I loved.

But this was not my first visit to Europe. In the year 1878, when I

¹ From the *Japan Advertiser* (Tokyo American daily), August 22

was a boy, barely seventeen, I was brought over by my brother to those shores. It will be difficult for you to realize what visions we had in the East, in those days, of this great continent of Europe. Though I was young, and though my knowledge of English was very insufficient, yet I had heard of her great poets and her heroes, of the ideal Europe of literature, so full of love of freedom and of humanity.

Italy was my first introduction to Europe. In those days the steamers stopped at Brindisi, and I still remember that when we reached the port it was midnight under a full moon. I came rushing up on deck from my bed, and shall never forget that marvelous scene, enveloped in the silent mystery of the moonlight — the sight of Europe asleep like a maiden dreaming of beauty and peace.

It was fortunate for me that Brindisi was a small town, a quiet place, not so aggressively different from the scenes to which I had been accustomed from my childhood. I felt sure that its heart was open to me, to welcome the boy poet, who, though young, was even in those days a dreamer. I was greatly elated as I left the steamer to pass the night in what I suppose in these days of progress would be termed a third-rate hotel, having no electric light or other conveniences. I felt that I was in the arms of this great mother Europe, and my heart seemed to feel the warmth of her breast.

The next day I awoke, and with my brother and an Indian friend wandered into an orchard close by, a Garden of Paradise which threatened no punishment against trespassers. Ah! what delight I had that morning in the limpid sunlight, in the hospitality of leaf and fruit and flower. There was an Italian girl there, who reminded me of our Indian maidens,

with eyes dark like bees, which have the power to explore the secret honey-cells of love in the lotus of our hearts. (You know, with us the lotus is the emblem of the heart.) She was a simple girl with a colored kerchief round her head and a complexion not too white. That is, it was no pallid lack of complexion. Hers was like that of a bunch of grapes caressed by the warm kisses of the sun — the sun which had modulated the beauty of her face, giving it a tender bloom.

I need not dwell at length upon the feelings I experienced; it is enough to say that I was of the impressionable age of seventeen! I felt that I had come to a land of beauty, of repose, and joy, which even at that time inspired my mind with the idea that one day I should claim its welcome for me.

With me it was a case of love at first sight; but for my companions it was but a fleeting moment, so that I was not free to stay, but had to continue the journey with my brother, who wanted me to hasten to my lessons in English. Being a truant by nature, I had always refused to attend my classes, and thus having become a problem to my elders, they had decided to send me to England to learn under compulsion the language which, according to their notion, would give me the stamp of respectability.

England is a great country, and I pay my homage to the greatness of her people, but I must be excused if I did not appreciate it at the moment. For an Indian boy such as I was, left there alone in the depth of winter when the birds were silent and the sun was miserly with its gifts, the country seemed on every side like a visible spirit of rude refusal. I was homesick and extremely shy; I was frightened at the sombrely dressed people who stared at me. From my

lodging house, facing Regent's Park, I would gaze with a feeling of bewilderment at its monotony of leaflessness, through the mists, the fogs, and the drizzle. In a word, I was young — too young to enter into the spirit of England at that time. I merely glanced at the surface of things, with my distracted heart always yearning for its own nest across the sea.

After a few months' stay I went back home to India. But I dare not here give a recital of my idle days which followed to those of you who are young, and for whom the example of a studiously strenuous life of usefulness would perhaps be more beneficial. I avoided all kinds of educational training that could give me any sort of standardized culture stamped with a university degree. I dreamt, wrote verses, stories, and plays, lived in solitude on the banks of the Ganges, and hardly knew anything of the movements and counter-movements of forces in the great world.

While I was in the midst of my creative work, there came to me an inner message asking me to come out of my seclusion and seek life in the heart of the crowd. I knew not what I could do. I had a love for children, so that I called them around me, in order to rescue them from the dismal dungeons of the Educational Department and find for them that atmosphere of sympathy and freedom which they needed most. I chose a beautiful and secluded spot where, in collaboration with Mother Nature, it was possible to bring up these boys in a spirit of wisdom and love.

While I was still busy doing service to children, I do not know what possessed me all of a sudden. From some far-away sky came to me a call of pilgrimage reminding me that we are all born pilgrims — pilgrims of this green earth. A voice questioned

me: 'Have you been to the sacred shrine where Divinity reveals itself in the thoughts and dreams and deeds of man?' I thought possibly it was in Europe, where I must seek it and know the full meaning of my birth as a human being in this world. And so for the second time I came to this continent.

But meanwhile I had grown up and learned much of the history of man. I had sighed with the great poet Wordsworth, who became sad when he saw what man had done to man. We, too, have suffered at the hands of man — not tigers and snakes, not elemental forces of nature, but human beings. Men are ever the greatest enemy of man. I have felt and known it. All the same, there was a hope, deep in my heart, that I should find some place, some temple, where the immortal spirit of man dwelt hidden like the sun behind the clouds.

Yet, when I arrived in the land of my quest, I could not stop the insistent question which kept troubling me with a sense of despair: 'Why is it that Europe with all her power of mind is racked with unrest? How is it that she is overcome with such a whirlwind of suspicion and jealousy and greed? Why is it that her greatness itself offers a vast field for fiercely contending passions to have their devil-dance in the lurid light of conflagration?'

When I traveled from Italy to Calais I saw the beautiful scenery on both sides of the railway. These men, I thought, have the ability to love their soil; and what a great power is this love! How they have beautified and made fruitful the whole continent with heroic sacrifice! With the force of their love they have fully won their country for themselves, and this ever-active service of their devotion, for generations, has given rise

in them to an irresistible truth, and truth gives fullness of life. The earth is overwhelmed by it, not because of man's covetousness, but because of this life-giving shower of heart and mind that he has poured around him. How he has struggled to eradicate the obstinate barrenness from the inert! How he has fought and defeated at every step the evil in everything that was hostile in his surroundings! Why, then, this dark misery lowering over Europe? Why this widespread menace of doom in her sky?

Because the love for her own soil and children will no longer suffice for her. So long as destiny offered to her only a limited problem, Europe did more or less satisfactorily solve it. Her answer was patriotism, nationalism — that is to say, love only for that and those to whom she happened to be related. According to the degree of truth in this love she has reaped her harvest of welfare. But to-day, through the help of science, the whole world has been given to her for a problem. How to answer it in the fullness of truth, she has yet to learn. Because the problem has become vast the wrong answer is fraught with immense danger.

A great truth has been laid bare to you, and according to your dealing with it you will attain the fulfillment of your destiny. If you do not have the strength to accept it in the right spirit your humanity will rapidly degenerate; your love of freedom, love of justice, love of truth, love of beauty, will be rejected of God.

Do you realize how a rigid ugliness is everywhere apparent — in your cities, in your commerce, the same monotonous mask — so that nowhere is there room for a living expression of the spirit? This is the creeping in of death, limb by limb, in the body of your civilization.

Love can be patient. Beauty is moulded and matured by patience. Your great artists knew it in the days when they could gladly modulate all the riches of their leisure into some tiny detail of beauty. The greedy man can never do this. Factories are the triumph of ugliness, for no one has the patience to try to give them the touch of grace; and so, everywhere in God's world to-day, we are faced with what is called progress toward inhospitable ugliness, toward the eddy of a bottomless passion which is voracity. Can you call to mind any great voice speaking out of the human heart in these modern days?

We have, no doubt, reason to be proud of science. We offer to Europe our homage in return for her gift of science, now bequeathed to posterity. Our sages have said: 'The Infinite has to be known and realized.' For man the Infinite is the only true source of happiness. Europe has come face to face with the Infinite in the world of extension, the domain of external nature.

I do not cry down the material world. I fully realize that this is the nurse and the cradle of the spirit. By achieving the Infinite in the heart of the material world you have made this world more generous than it ever was. But merely coming to a rich fact does not give us that right to own it. The great science which you have discovered still awaits your meriting. Through what you have gained outwardly you may become successful, but you may miss greatness in spite of the success.

Because you have strenuously cultivated your mind in Europe, because of your accuracy of observation and the development of your reasoning faculties, these discoveries have to be realized by a complete humanity — knowing has to be brought under the

control of being—before truth can be fully honored. But our being, the fundamental reality in the human world, with which all other truths have to be brought into harmony at any cost, is not within the domain of science. Truth when not properly treated turns back on us to destroy us. Your very science is thus becoming your destroyer.

I have come to your door seeking the voice of humanity, which must sound its solemn challenge and overcome the clamor of the greedy crowd of slave drivers. Perhaps it is already being uttered in whispers behind closed doors, and will grow in volume till it bursts forth in a thundering cry of judgment, and the vulgar shout of brute force is silenced in awe.

MENDACITY

BY A. E. COPPARD

[London Mercury]

TRUTH is love and love is truth,
 Either neither in good sooth:
 Truth is truth and love is love,
 Give us grace to taste thereof.
 But if truth offend my sweet
 Then I will have none of it,
 And if love offend the other,
 Farewell truth, I will not bother.

Happy truth when truth accords
 With the love in lovers' words!
 Harm not truth in any part,
 But keep its shadow from love's heart.
 Men must love, tho' lovers' lies
 Outpall the stars in florid skies,
 And none may keep, and few can merit,
 The fond joy that they inherit.

Who with love at his command
 Dare give truth a welcome hand?
 Believe it, or believe it not,
 'T is a lore most vainly got.
 Truth requites no penny-fee,
 Niggard's honey feeds no bee,
 Ere this trick of truth undo me
 Little love, my love, come to me.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

Alert Japan

RECENT advices from Japan indicate that California's fear of the Yellow Peril should be transferred from political to intellectual fields. Not that the nation is politically inactive. Her Commission for Cultural Work in the East has just put through an agreement with the Chinese that governs the expenditure of the proceeds of the Boxer Indemnity. Our own country's policy toward China in regard to the money due us on the same indemnity was so successful that others have taken it up in various ways. Japan has seen fit to follow closely in our footsteps, and arrange for the education in Japan of a certain number of Chinese each year in order to inculcate the germs of Sino-Japanese friendship. But the Chinese have been suspicious. Various European nations will be disgusted to learn that the Chinese felt that America was really prompted by generosity when she educated Chinese students on indemnity money. Until we offer free courses in Home Economics at our co-educational universities to indigent Frenchmen, this suspicion is likely to flourish.

The Japanese, however, have succeeded in putting through an agreement which sets up a committee in Peking composed of ten Japanese and eleven Chinese, who administer the cash. Under an editorial entitled 'Buying Chinese Friendship,' the *Japan Advertiser*, an American daily published in Tokyo, says that China looks suspiciously at the whole affair; but the fact remains that the agreement went through.

When the youthful Chinese student comes to Japan to complete his education he will be installing himself in the country that, next to Germany, publishes more books a year than any other. The Osaka *Mainichi* announces that during last year 18,028 books appeared in Japan — an increase of four thousand over the year before. In 1924 German books ran to nearly 36,000, but this number includes some that were distributed in Austria. In the same year Britain published 12,000, a record for that country, and the United States but 6380. This, however, was less than usual for us. At all events, these figures show that Japan is a nation of eager readers, and, as long as her 18,000 books are better than some 6370 of ours, the Chinese students are to be envied their opportunity.

But the most cheering news of all from Japan is the statement by Dr. Dansui, just back in France after three years of archæology in Indo-China, to the effect that the first settlers of the Asiatic mainland were members of the Caucasian race. Dr. Torii, a Tokyo authority on the same subject, was so pleased to hear this that he promptly announced that the Ainu race that originally settled in Japan is white too. He quotes, but does not name, a British authority who states that the Ainus came from New Guinea to their present home. There is, too, a possibility that Indo-Chinese Caucasians may be linked with the presumably white primitives of Australia. Dr. Torii boggles at Dr. Dansui's argument, for it seems to hinge on a copper drum used in Indo-China. This kind of drum is said to be the infallible earmark of a Mongol.