

The Ideal of Work.

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“And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward look, the land is bright.”

—Arthur Hugh Clough.

“Doubt, desire, sorrow, remorse, indignation and despair itself vie like bull-dogs beleaguering the soul of the poor day worker as of every other man; but he bends himself against his task and all these are quelled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves.”

—Carlyle.

Work is necessary both for worldly success and for spiritual enlightenment. All true knowledge, the knowledge of the Self, comes through work. The running water is limpid and pure, the stagnant pool becomes obnoxious. Aristotle was right when he said there is no holiday for virtue. Virtue lies in activity and not in capacity or acquired state of perfection. There is no light unless the wick and the oil consume. In

this consumption is life, light and brilliance. By the law of spiritual compensation, the lamp of virtue does not exhaust its material so long as it works. The more it is used, the more replenished it becomes.

Worldly men as we are, we cannot live at all times to that high state of spiritual peace which we enjoy so long as our gaze is concentrated on the Supreme Essence. The world has its vortices. The more we try to free ourselves from them, the more we study them, the more we become involved. Once an anxiety gets hold of a man's mind it brings a million in its train. And the more we dwell on them, the more is our heart thrown out of spiritual tranquillity. Edward Carpenter in one of his books “From Elphinstone to Elephanta” in a chapter entitled ‘A visit to a Gyani’ says, “Kill the thought at the moment and you can do anything with it afterwards.” The thought whose force is checked gives its power to the Self. The greater the number of thoughts one checks, when they are in full vehe-

mence, the greater is a person's spiritual strength.

But checking the vehemence or the force of any thought is no easy matter. Schopenhauer in his book "The World as Will and Idea" at one place says, "The greater wonder is not the conqueror of the world but the conqueror of the Self." In the Upaniṣads the All-pervading Being is told to be the master of mind. God is मनीषी. Hence to be able to control one's mind is to be one with God.

One way to control one's mind is to take to some work that lies at hand, immediately a bad thought takes hold of one's mind. Anxiety will not be killed by dwelling on it but by ignoring it. We must bless our souls if we can take to any work just when we are most pressed by anxiety. "Blessed is he who has found his work and is up to it; let him ask no other blessing."

The *Gītā* gives the doctrine:

कायेन मनसा बुद्ध्या केवलैरिन्द्रियैरपि ।
योगिनः कर्म कुर्वन्ति सङ्गं त्यक्त्वात्मशुद्धये ॥

The *Yogī* does the work with the mind, body, or sense-organs in order that his soul may be purified. The mind does not gain rest when it has no definite occupation. It is ever active, and its actions in such a condition are injurious to the true interests of the Self.

Absence of occupation is not rest.

"A mind quite vacant is a mind
distrest."

—Cowper.

But very often we are faced with the question what work should we do? What is my duty? Work is to be found on all sides—which work should we avoid and which should we take to? Tolstoy has given a very good answer to this question in the form of a story which is worth reproducing here. As it solves troublesome problems of many a soul, it has a very great spiritual value. It is in consonance with the central thought of the *Gītā*.

The story begins thus: It once occurred to a certain King that if he always knew the right time to begin everything, if he knew who were the right persons to listen to and whom to avoid; and, above all, if he always knew what was the most important thing to do, he would never fail in anything he would undertake. The King asked answer to these questions from the various wise persons of his realm, but none of their answers satisfied him. To the first question some said that the King should have a programme of work in advance and this would give the proper time for any action. Others said it was not possible. In answer to the second question some said that what the King needed most were his councillors, others said that he needed the priests or doctors or warriors most. In answer to the third question also there were several answers. Some said the most important thing in the world was science, others said warfare and others still said religious worship. The King was satisfied with none of the answers, so he

himself went to a hermit, living far away as he was reputed for his wisdom, to get the proper answer.

The hermit lived in a hut and did not receive anyone except common folk. The King therefore put on the dress of an ordinary man and went on foot to the hermit. The hermit was digging a piece of land when the King arrived there. He was lean and could hardly work with the spade. Yet he was working. When the King approached him, he put his three questions to him. The hermit did not answer the questions, but silently by gesture asked him to help him in digging the ground. The hermit seemed tired and so the King took up his work and continued it on for an hour. Then, again, he asked his questions. But again the hermit did not answer the questions and wanted to resume his work. But the King out of politeness would not allow it, and went on digging till it was evening. Then the King again asked his questions, and said to the hermit that if he did not mean to answer them, he might go.

Just then a person drenched in blood came running up to them. The hermit became busy with him and asked the King to attend to his needs. The King found that the man was wounded in the stomach and would soon die if the flow of the blood were not stopped. The King did all that was needed to save the life of this stranger. It was night by then and the King being tired of the whole day's work fell fast asleep and slept soundly till morning.

When he awoke, he saw the wounded man lying by his side. The latter began to pray him for forgiveness. The King was surprised at it. He did not know the man, but the man told him that he was his bitter enemy, whose land and goods had been confiscated by the King and whose brother had been hanged. He had learnt that the King was going to the hermit. Hence he had gone to take his revenge. He had been lying in ambush when he was found out by the King's servants who wounded him. He now became the friend of the King as he owed his life to him. But for his service, he would have expired. The King was glad to see that his bitter enemy had turned a friend to him at such a cheap cost.

As it was now broad daylight, the King wanted to depart from the hut. He again went to the hermit to ask answer to his questions. The hermit said: "You have already been answered." The King was surprised, but the hermit made it clear.

The hermit said, "Do you not see if you had not pitied my weakness yesterday and had not dug these beds for me, but had gone your way, that man would have attacked you and you would have repented of not having stayed with me. So the most important time was when you were digging the beds; and I was the most important man; and to do me good was the most important business. Afterwards when that man ran to us, the most important time was when you were attending to him, for if you had not bound up his

wounds he would have died without having made peace with you. So he was the most important man, and what you did for him was the most important business. Remember then; there is only one time that is important—Now. It is the only important time because it is the only time when we have any power. The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows whether he will ever have any dealings with anyone else; and the most important affair is to do him good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life.”

I know many of my readers may be well aware of this story. But truth never becomes stale by repetition. Meditation on old thoughts brings new wisdom. This story makes it clear that in this complex world we cannot decide beforehand what would be our duty in the course of our life. As we proceed our path opens out. The true worker has no dearth of work. One step leads on to another. The work that lies to hand is the most important. “Refuse not the employment”, says Carlyle, “which the hour brings thee for one more ambitious. The highest Heaven of Wisdom is near alike from every point; and thou must find it, if at all, by a method native to thyself alone.”

Every man finds his work after his nature in the environment in which he is placed. Let him think that it is the Divine Hand that ordains everything and that has placed him there. In one’s own special environment lies one’s duty and in

doing service to those around us lies spiritual elevation. Men are everywhere alike. If one class of men—those who surround you—does not satisfy you, neither will another class. If one kind of environment does not suit you, a changed environment will also become soon too hot. Everyone carries his devil with him; and it is this which creates mischiefs.

The eternally working man is not only at peace with himself, but is also creating friends about him. No one likes one who does not give anything to others. Again, we can right the wrongs we have done to anyone simply by doing new acts of goodness. “New actions are the only apologies and explanations of the old which the noble can bear to receive or to offer.” We can undo the evil only by doing the good. Thus constant work is one law of happiness and success in life. The supreme bliss is realized through devoted, selfless work. When the mind is most disturbed, it is at that time when we need work most to bring equanimity to the soul. Let a man begin doing any work, at that moment, that commands his attention, and from All-Powerful Unfathomable Nature the solution to his problems will arise. Nature helps him who has faith in her. Our intellect is too limited, our vision too narrow to know the ultimate possibilities of what we are doing. But every good act, to be sure, saves from many misfortunes. The above story makes it clear.

नेहाभिक्रमनाज्ञोऽस्ति प्रस्थवायो न विद्यते ।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥

"In this path (of disinterested action) there is no loss of effort, nor is there fear of transgression. Even a little practice of this discipline protects one from great fear (of birth and death)."

(Gita II. 40)

This thought has been appreciated both in the East and in the West. A nation or an individual remains great so long as the path of duty is followed, so long as work which is the eternal law of life is not shirked. Everyone has to work. Some are forced to it, others do it willingly, spontaneously and freely.

In the case of the latter performance of duty, joy and freedom become one.

No work sincerely done goes in vain. There are many who are out to exploit other man's labour. But this exploitation does not last long. The sins of the exploiters recoil on their heads. Nature does not tolerate cheating. Let us be firmly convinced of this truth. Noble sincere work may not be valued by others, but it does good to the soul that works. It brings him nearer God. Thus work its own reward.



Flower-Birth.

I am the clay-petal of a mortal flower-birth,
I am the barren brownness of desert-desire,
Through my dim pores is fluted the music of earth,
My breast bears the candle of a glow-worm fire.

I am a pilgrim-poet on the ways of the world,
My poems are surges swinging upon Time's ocean,
Around my life's stone-torpor ages have swirled,
Far-calling fountain-voices of deep emotion.

When the divine death-victor Will comes near,
My sleeping soul remembers an ancient duty:
My dark dungeons, light-festivalled, disappear,
And heavenly jewels jingle in my earth-beauty.

Crowned with pure joy each clamouring atom stills:
At the feet of the Timeless-Beloved my body thrills.

—Nishikanta.

