

The Ancient Faith and the Modern Mind.

(By T. L. Vaswani.)

The poet interpreted history when he said that by the Soul only the nations shall be great and free. As a nation thinks in its heart, so it becomes; and once the Kingdom of Freedom is built in the Soul within, nothing can check its advance to the outer realms of Society and the State. Freedom, indeed, is an achievement of faith; and the measure of its decline in faith is the measure of a nation's decay. Greece was great in the days she believed that the visible should express ideal values of life; Athens stood a symbol of the goddess Athena; the 'mysteries' assured the people of an unseen Source of strength and help, and the very games of Hellas were meant to be a tribute to the Gods. Olympian religion was mixed up, I believe, with many superstitions; but it had the one vitalizing element of faith in the Power

that makes for Righteousness—for Truth and Beauty and Freedom. Then came a time when that faith passed away and there set in, as Francis Galton has pointed out, decay in social morality. Then entered new tribes into Greece, and Greece, strong intellectually but weak in her soul, succumbed to Rome. Rome, too, declined one day; Marcus Aurelius died in 180; the period from 180 to 330 is a period of decadence in Rome, it was a period marked by lack of faith. Tacitus, the author of 'Annals', was great intellectually, but not, I am afraid, in the soul; Juvenal was a shrewd observer: his 'Satires' lamented the past, but uttered no message of faith; what wonder Rome declined and the Huns overran Europe. Loss of faith results in a slacking of social morality, and therefore in decadence of the Nation. Of nations, as of individuals,

it is true that they live not by bread alone. What is the situation in India? Religion is under an eclipse to-day. How many worship God at home or in the temples? How many read the scriptures? How many of the houses have rooms set apart to serve as family sanctuaries? And what is the state of our temples? If a Christ were in our midst, he would turn out not a few of the temple-keepers as unworthy of the 'Father's House.' Indifference and scepticism are growing; the vital values of the Scriptures and Civilization of India are ignored; and young men have been found echoing with some pride the foolish remark of Macaulay that a single shelf of a good European Library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia!

Among the reasons which explain why the status of Religion has suffered, two may be mentioned—*increasing economic pressure and advance of rationalism*. With the spread of western civilization the struggle for existence has become keener, and men find little time to think of the great problems of *life* when they have to work, day and night, to earn their *livelihood*. So with the spread of rationalism new minds have been formed, new ways of thinking have appeared; the angle of vision has changed; people are no longer in a receptive mood; free thinking has become a necessity of the new age. We are unable to dispense with 'civilization.' We must not discourage the rational attitude. Neither may we hope for national freedom, if faith decline. The Ancient Faith, as I shall endeavour to show, is still our need and answers, I believe, the noblest impulses and aspirations of the modern man.

I shall confine my remarks in this paper to Hinduism. What are the es-

entials of Hinduism? The word 'Hinduism' is not found in the old books; the faith it stands for is not associated with the name of any one individual; in the Books it is called *Sanatana Dharma*, the 'Eternal' Religion: what are its essentials? An English critic characterises Hinduism as 'animism more or less transformed by philosophy;' and again, as 'magic tempered by metaphysics.' Animism is the religion of some savage tribes; and it is foolish to indentify it with the religious consciousness of the Hindu—a consciousness which aspired to something nobler than the heaven-world, the *Svarjaloka*. "For Blessedness I seek", sang a Southern Saint, "not Indra's choicest delights, nor the pleasure of other gods." Another European critic says: a Hindu is one who cremates; but are there not Hindu ascetics, Lingayats and others, who bury the dead? Surely, Hinduism is more than this ceremony or that. Then, there are critics who say the Hindu is one who believes in caste; but Chaitanya and Nanak and several Hindu reformers have not believed in caste; Kabir, though a Mohammedan, has a following among the Hindus; and the Upanishads say again: "The Eternal hath no Caste." Caste is not peculiar to India; you find it in Europe and America. When the Negro prince Khana was entertained by the Duke of Westminster in London, the whites of South Africa expressed their disgust at the Duke's conduct: he had dined with a Negro! When Roosevelt dined with Dr. Booker Washington, there was public criticism of the ex-President's conduct: was not Booker Washington a Negro? And America has not yet solved its Negro problem. They speak of classes and masses in the West; one fails to see how these classes differ from castes. Where there is denial of human brother-

hood, there is caste in the objectionable sense of that word. The denial of brotherhood has unfortunately existed in India, as it has in other countries; but India's teachers and prophets have not sanctioned it. *Varnasrama*, as conceived by the Indian sages, is but a profound perception of the sociological truth that there must be differentiation of functions in the social organism, that there must be in a well-organised society different vocations, viz., one, the vocation of the teacher, educationist, scientist, the Brahmin vocation,—another, that of the soldier and statesman, the Kshatriya vocation,—a third, that of the agriculturist or merchant, the Vaisya vocation,—a fourth, that of the manual worker, the Sudra vocation; but all were to be honoured, for all sprang from *Brahma*.

Hinduism, it seems to me, has three aspects: it is a *Darsana*, it is a *Dharma*, it is a *Marga*; and these three aspects are, as I understand them, common to Vaishnavism, Saivism and the various sects and orders of the Hindu Faith. Consider, first, Hinduism as a *Marga*, the *Aryamarga*. It stands for a method of attainment, not a vague belief. Hinduism is not credal; it asks its disciples to tread a path of self-discipline and realisation; and in doing this it recognises the truth that there is a diversity of temperaments and development, that at the back of a Soul are experiences, and that, therefore, different souls must develop different aptitudes. The Path, the *Marga*, is, accordingly, a threefold one, associated in the Books with the words *Karma*, *Jnana* and *Bhakti*. The *Karma-Marga*, at a particular stage, is enjoined on all; its obligations are three. The first is *Upasana* whereby is meant something

quite different from formal worship or ritualism; to do *Upasana* is literally to sit under the influence of the Spirit, to feel the word and voice of the Lord in a quiet hour of communion. Another is that which is referred to in the Books as 'Debts.' There is the debt we owe to God, that of daily worship. There is the debt we owe to the Rishis, the Seers, the Teachers of India,—the debt of studying their sayings and scriptures. There is the debt we owe to Ancestors, that of giving healthy children to the Nation and seeing that the 'thread of the race is not broken'. There is the debt we owe to fellow men—the debt of hospitality and service; and all who help, by word or act, the widow, the orphan, the sick, the hungry, the poor, the men and women and children who need better houses and better socio-economic conditions of life, are the real servants of society. *Karma*, Action, is essential to salvation: such is the teaching of Hinduism. Only let the *Karma* be disinterested; this is what the *Gita* says over and over again. And yet there are critics who would have us believe that the Hindu Faith condemns *Karma*. In his *Indian Studies* General Sir O'Moore Creagh says:—"A dogma of Hinduism is to withdraw from all worldly concerns!" In pursuance of this dogma, Sir O'Moore Creagh adds, "many of India's best Hindu men have abandoned worldly concerns, much to the public detriment, and the land has been filled with religious ascetics who go about naked, torturing their miserable, attenuated bodies in ways too disgusting to relate, and who are, moreover, a heavy tax on poor Hindu villagers whose charity is unbounded." In writing thus the critic shows ignorance of the Hindu teaching concerning *Karma-marga*.

Then there is the *Jnana-marga*, and we read in the Books that *Karma* well

performed leads to *Jnana* or Knowledge. Knowing by doing—such is the thought of India's sages. The knowledge of the *Atma*, of the Self within you, will not be born until your heart has been made pure by the doing of noble deeds. In a beautiful text in the *Isopanishad* we read that only he who knows *both knowledge and not-knowledge* can be saved. And *not-knowledge* is '*Karma*', *Action*. Both knowledge and action are needed for the building of character; and this knowledge, *Jnana*, involves thought-concentration. The *Jnana-marga* is the path of meditation, of thought-power. Thought-concentration builds new brain cells; it opens up intuitions and brings the Soul into fellowship with reality; and I have often felt that the modern age needs the power of meditation, the *tapasya* of *Jnana*, to be saved from its distractions, passions, and excitement. Be still to know thy God!

Then there is the *Bhakti-marga*, the way of love or devotion. Prahlada breathes out the aspiration of the real *Bhakta* in his prayer to Vishnu:—"In whatever birth I may pass, may I, O Lord, have unshaken devotion to Thy Lotus Feet!"* Such *Bhaktas* India needs to-day to help forward the National Movement.

How these experiences, gathered on the triple path—the *Karma-Jnana-Bhakti-Marga*—were organised into a *Dharma*, a social synthesis in ancient *Aryavarta*, there is no time to tell. Hinduism as a *Dharma* is a subject which should have a separate treatment. I need only speak a word or two concerning Hinduism as a *Darsana*. For the faith that does not deepen into insight, illumination, is but

ॐ नाथ योनिसहस्रेषु येषु येषु प्रजाम्यहम् ।
तेषु तेष्वचला भक्तिरच्युतासु सदा त्वयि ॥

a creed; religion *at first hand* was the craving of the ancient Arvan. 'The man destitute of *Darsana* (दर्शनेन विहीनः), say the Scriptures, is involved in the cycle of Existence. *Darsana* is fellowship with the Ideal-Real called in the Books the *Atma*, the Self within us, the Self of the universe. In a passage of great beauty Yajurvedyavalkya compares the things of the world to the notes of a flute. The notes, he rightly points out, cannot be seized, except when the instrument of the player is seized; even so, it is urged, when the *Atma* is seen all else is known; the *Atma*, the Self, is the ground of knowledge and the source of experiences. This vision of the One-in-all inspired the noblest utterances of Hindu sages; and, filled with a sense of unity, they uttered the *Mantra*: एतमेवद्वितीयम्. Here comes the Hindu doctrine of *Leela*—the doctrine that the universe is a love-game of the Eternal. As Kabir says in one of his beautiful hymns, 'God has spread His form of love through all the worlds'. And with this doctrine of *Leela* is connected the doctrine of *Maya*—a doctrine often misunderstood by critics. For *Maya* refers, not to the illusory, but to the passing, the impermanent; and even to-day the Hindu servant may be heard saying that the Sahib's anger is *Maya*, meaning that the Sahib's anger will soon pass away! Yes, the things of the world are *Maya*; your sufferings are *Maya*, for they too will pass away, giving place to the Peace that abides; our very personality is *Maya*; for it, too, must pass away and we must build up the Higher Personality bit by bit through the experiences of life after life.

He who has a glimpse of the One-in-all knows that the universe has in it more than most of us understand; he

knows that one Creative Life flows into all; he knows that there are no essential differences, no unbridgeable gulfs in the universe; for the essence of it is the one Self. Sir J. C. Bose taught us to believe in the response of plants and minerals; Mr. Francis Darwin has taught us to believe that plants have brains, that climbing plants have intelligence which they show when they feel about with their tendrils, as men would with their fingers, until they secure a proper hold! Captain Musgrave even said he discovered at Columbia a plant which had a brain, a nervous system and digestive organs! This perception of the unity of life made the Aryan reverent to all forms of life; *Ahimsa* became India's creed, as it has not yet been of any other nation. If, indeed, the One life functions through every form, how dare you destroy any creature, or do harm to anything in the universe? There is evil in the world, you say; but the *Hindu Dharma* uttered boldly the truth that you must not resist evil except with the good; *ahimsa* and non-resistance go together. What an inspiring message this, of Hinduism:—Have kinship with all; life is not fight, as civilisation is not war; the deepest self of all nations and races is the One Eternal Self; and each has an unknown chord, which, when touched, breathes notes of Harmony from this Hidden Self. Kinship with all! For the Self in you binds you, as by invisible chains, to the suns and stars, to the things of the earth and the things of the sky. Only enter into silence, only sit in the great spaces of your soul-life, and you will have a glimpse of the splendour of the

Infinite in all. Did you ever ask yourself why it is that you cannot well understand anything in the world, not even a grain of sand? The grain of sand is inseparable from the Infinite; 'the flower in the crannied wall' is a thought of the Creative Artist; who can understand them all in all? Charged with this consciousness science becomes worship, nature a temple, history a Scripture, knowledge a communion with the Wonderful, and the one *Dharma* of life is understood to be a daily sacrifice to the Self.

Daily Sacrifice—this, to my mind, is the eternal meaning and message of Hinduism; it is the task to which the sages and seers of Aryavarta summon us today. How many will answer the summons, not with weak, smooth words but with strong, noble deeds of life? Alas, from Indian homes comes, to-day, the shriek of the night and many there be who suffer in silence and die; how many of those who say they are Hindus are ready to be poor, forsaken, obscure, unknown for the service of the Eternal Self? As many as there be—no matter what their names or religious labels—are the true disciples of the Hindu faith; and to them the Rishis send their affectionate call, asking them to serve India at this hour. India's interpreters will such men be to the Nation; and India's hills and seas and streams they will re-people with a radiant idealism; and though their names be unremembered, they will live in the Achievements of the New Indian Nation. For they are deathless who die, offering daily sacrifice to the Mystery that is God.

