

The Secret of India's Greatness.

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[Being the substance of a Lecture delivered by His Holiness on 14th February 1933 at the Vasanta Mandapa Hall of Sri Skanda Swami Temple, Park Town, Madras.]

After speaking for about fifteen minutes in Sanskrit, His Holiness said:—

Strange and stirring, critical and epoch-making are the times in which our lots have been cast—times during which, in the history of the world in general and alas! of India, too, to-day in particular, we are called upon to face an incessant and tremendous conflict between two different civilisations, two different cultures, two different goals, two different outlooks, two different modes of life and two different frames of mind, in fact, one may go so far as to say, “two different everythings!” It therefore behoves every thinking man and woman amongst us to weigh the *Pros* and *Cons* carefully, arrive at correct conclusions calculated to lead us triumphantly on to real and lasting progress in all directions and then to act upon those conclusions faithfully. To think carefully, to decide correctly and to act faithfully—these are the three duties before us.

But before we can go on to think out and discuss what is really necessary for us in order to ensure our welfare and our progress all round and before we can hope to agree amongst ourselves as to what these words ‘Welfare’ and ‘Progress’ do and ought really to mean, denote and connote for us, we should, at any rate, be able to start on this enquiry with a frank recognition and ad-

mission of the fact that, whatever differences of opinion there may be amongst us as regards the *means*, there is absolutely not the least doubt that we are all in perfect agreement in respect of our *goal*, i. e., that all of us are keen on our onward and upward march. Progress *is* absolutely necessary; for, progress is not merely a sign and a *symptom* of life but we may go further and even call it a *condition* of life and postulate that, unless there is progress, we may be sure that either there is no life at all or that it is actually deteriorating! This is perfectly true and cannot be gainsaid. But the real difficulty herein for us arises, because we are apt to think shallowly and imagine the converse of the just-now-enunciated proposition to be also true and to run away with the idea that change automatically means and indicates progress! As a matter of fact, it does nothing of the sort! Change for its own sake, change by itself, does *not necessarily* mean progress. Change *will* be necessary, change *is* necessary. But, in what direction? This is the chief thing for us to consider carefully and decide accurately. In other words, we all agree that we should be marching along, all the time; but the whole question really is, as to whither we should march?

The Orient and the Occident.

And it is when we begin to consider this question that the whole conflict is

of great importance, nay, of tremendous and terrific moment to us—the conflict between what we may roughly call the Orient and the Occident ! From the strictly geographical standpoint, there is, of course, no real Orient and no real Occident at all. For, as we know from elementary Astronomy and even from our school Geography, one who starts from the East and goes straight to the West will ultimately come back to the East: and *vice versa* !

But there are certain well-defined notions of what the East and the West constitute or are constituted of and what particular part of the world we refer to when we use the words 'East' and 'West' in connection with cultural and other such differences! Speaking, therefore, not in the Astronomical or Geographical or Topographical sense but in the sense in which the words have been *crystallised in actual usage*, we associate the East with certain things and the West with certain other things and then we speak of the ideals, cultures, goals, outlooks, modes of life and frames of mind, of the East and the West.

Prejudices.

When we go into this question from the angle of vision just indicated, there is the natural tendency for us to go into one of the two directions by sheer force of prepossession for the one and prejudice against the other. There will be those amongst us who will naturally say that because this is their ancient inherited system, therefore they prefer it; and, on the other side, there are those who would go in for change just *because* it is change ! Both these frames of mind are injurious, because, in the ultimate disposal of the matter, they are likely to

lead us wholly astray. They are all the more dangerous because they are generally unconscious, and subtle insidious tendencies which we should therefore be all the more vigilantly on our guard against ! It is extremely pathetic, in this connection, to note, in passing, that even such a broad-minded and philosophically inclined poet as the late Alfred Lord Tennyson fell an unconscious prey to this very type of insidious temptation which we have been describing as a very dangerous distorter of our visions and warper of our judgments, when he said:—

*'Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true.'*

The *metre* and the rhyme therein are not wrong, of course ; but the *matter* in the Second half is all wrong ! His ringing out of the old year and his ringing in of the new year were perfectly correct ; but when he proceeded further and equated the old with the false and the new with the true, the jingling rhyme of it was Sweet to the ear, but as regards the idea itself, we must say that his brain had evidently—though doubtless unconsciously—succumbed to a mechanical idea on the matter of oldness and newness as being by themselves sufficient and convincing criteria for inferring falseness and trueness respectively !

The Test.

In this respect, our ancient Sanatana Vaidika Dharma has this great and tremendous advantage for us that, whereas other religions—while enjoining on their followers the necessity for and meritoriousness of Truth-speaking—do not, at the same time, call upon their followers to enquire into, consider the merits of and decide the truth or other-

wise of themselves (the Religions in question), it is our Sanatana Vaidika Dharma alone that possesses the unique peculiarity of not merely enjoining on others the Duty of Truth-speaking but lays even its own teachings, too, absolutely open to enquiry and determination on the basis thereof, as to the truth or otherwise of its own doctrines in respect of *Karma* (Action), *Bhakti* (Devotion) and *Juana* (Knowledge). For example—

1. The Scriptural text:—

सत्यान्नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

(There is no Religion higher than Truth);

2. Kalidasa's lines:—

पुराणमित्येष न साधु सर्वे
न चापि काव्यं नवमित्यवयम् ॥

(Nothing is good merely because it is ancient and no composition is faulty merely because it is new); and

3. the well-known dictum:—

युक्तियुक्तं वचो ग्राह्यं बालादपि शुकादपि ।
युक्तिहीनं वचस्त्याज्यं वृद्धादपि शुकादपि ॥

(Whatever is based on sound reasoning ought to be accepted even if it pro-

ceeds from a boy or from a parrot; and whatever is not so based ought to be rejected even if it emanates from an old man or from the great sage Suka Brahmarshi himself); are instances in point, proving beyond all possibility of doubt that the Touchstone of Critical Enquiry and Research is one to which not merely are others ordered to submit themselves but Sanatana Vaidika Dharma itself has always voluntarily submitted itself and even been calling upon all enquirers to test it, too, on !

We, therefore, should not enter upon such an enquiry as the one before us, with any axes of our own to grind or any vested interests of ours in favour of this side or that side but merely and entirely as honest, earnest, and conscientious Seekers after Truth and Correct Knowledge, with our dominating interests simply and solely concentrated upon the correct determination of the Truth in all the various departments of life; and this too we have to do, merely because it is only the finding out of the correct Principles and Laws of Nature and acting in accordance therewith that can lead us to Peace, Happiness and Joy, here as well as hereafter.*