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Facts and Opinions

An Unequal Fight

Our controversy with the *Bengalee* is like a conflict between denizens of two different elements. Not only has our contemporary the advantage of prompt reply, but he has such a giant's gulp for formulas, such a magnificent and victorious method of dealing with great fundamental questions in a few sentences, such a generous faculty for clouding a definite point with sounding generalisations that he leaves us weak and gasping for breath. However in our own feeble way we shall try to deal with the several points he has raised. Their importance must be our excuse for the length of our reply. One great difficulty in our way is that our contemporary for the convenience of his argument chooses to attribute to us the most ridiculous opinions born out of his own prolific brain and generous facility in reading whatever he chooses into other people's minds. He thinks, for instance, that by seeing a special manifestation of Divine Power and Grace in a particular movement we mean to shut God out from all others. This is a fair sample of the "inconsistencies" which the *Bengalee* is always finding in his own brain and projecting into ours. If we have to guard ourselves at every point against such gratuitous misconceptions, argument becomes impossible. Neither space nor patience will allow of it.

God and His Universe

The *Bengalee* takes as its fundamental position that God is Absolute, Eternal and Universal in all movements and not limited to any particular. Very true, but a vague statement of abstract truth like this leads nowhere beyond itself. What are the concrete implications in this generalisation? God is not only the Absolute, Eternal and Universal in His own essence, but He manifests in the relative, transient and particular. The Absolute is an aspect of Him necessary for philosophical completeness; but if He were only Absolute, then this phenomenal world would be only Maya, God *akarta* and all action purely illusory. If He were only Eternal we might regard this world as something not full of Him, but a separate creation which may or may not be subject to His immediate action. It is because He is the Universal that the clarified vision sees Him in every being and every activity. As the Absolute He stands behind every relative, as the Eternal He supports every transient and assures the permanence of the sum of phenomena; as the Universal He manifests Himself in every particular.

The Scientific Position

Still, there is the question, how does He manifest Himself? There is a school which holds that He has once for all manifested Himself in certain eternal and universal laws and has no other connection with the universe. This was the attitude definitely taken by the *Indian Social Reformer* when it ridiculed S. J. Aurobindo Ghose's Uttarpara speech. God does not speak to men through their inner selves in Yoga or otherwise, there is no way of communion between Him and humanity, there is no special action of His power or grace anywhere. He speaks to men only through His laws; in other words, He does not speak to them at all. He does not act personally, He acts through His laws; in other words, He does not act at all, His laws act. This is an intelligible position and it contains the whole real quarrel

between Science and Religion. Science does not as yet recognise God. Taking its stand on the material senses and logical argument from external phenomena it demands proof before it will admit His existence. It sees plenty of proof of Shakti, of Prakriti, of Nature; it sees none of the Purusha or any room for His existence. If He exists at all, it must be as an Impersonal Being immanent in but different from Force and Energy and Himself inactive; but even of this there is no proof. Religion holds that God is not only impersonal but personal, not only Purusha but Prakriti, not only Being but Shakti; He is all. For the proof of its position Religion appeals to something higher than logic or the senses, to spiritual experience and the direct knowledge drawn from the secret discipline it has developed in most parts of the world.

Force Universal or Individual

It is not clear whether our contemporary recognises any personality in its Universal God or only recognises Him in all movements as natural Law. We hold that He manifests Himself in particulars not as Law, which is only a generalisation of the methods by which He acts, but as Shakti working for the Purusha. He puts Himself as force, energy, motive-power into every particular. It is perfectly true that every particular contains Him, but there are differences in the force of His manifestation. This is obvious in individuals. The strength of every particular individual is the strength of God and not his own, because every particular strength is merely a part of the universal force and it is really the universal force and not the individual strength that is acting. But in living beings, when consciousness has become separate, the individual is allowed to suppose himself to be strong in his own strength. He is not really so. God gave the strength and He can take it away. He gave it power to act and He can baffle its action of the fruits the individual sought and turn it to quite other results. This is so common an experience that we do not see how any man with the power of introspection can deny it. Only at ordinary times, when things seem to be

moving according to our calculations, we forget it, but on certain occasions He manifests Himself with such force either in events or in our own actions that unless we are blinded by egoism or by infatuation we are compelled to perceive the universality of the force that is acting and the insignificance of the individual. So also there are particular movements in particular epochs in which the Divine Force manifests itself with supreme power shattering all human calculations, making a mock of the prudence of the careful statesman and the scheming politician, falsifying the prognostications of the scientific analyser and advancing with a vehemence and velocity which is obviously the manifestation of a higher than human force. The intellectual man afterwards tries to trace the reasons for the movement and lay bare the forces that made it possible, but at the time he is utterly at fault, his wisdom is falsified at every step and his science serves him not. These are the times when we say God is in the movement, He is its leader and it must fulfil itself however impossible it may be for man to see the means by which it will succeed.

Faith and Deliberation

The next point is the question of mature deliberation. The *Bengalee* here tries to avoid confession of its error by altering the meaning of language. The mature deliberation of which it spoke applies only to particular acts and, even then, it was not one man or a dozen but the whole self-conscious part of the country which took part in these mature deliberations. The facts do not square with this modified assertion. The majority even of the particular steps taken in pursuance of the ideas which swept over the country were not taken in pursuance of mature deliberation but were the result in some men of a faith which defied deliberation and in others of a yielding to the necessity of the movement. The National Council of Education came into existence because S. Subodh Chandra Mallik planked down a lakh of rupees and was followed by the zamindar of Gauripur, an act of faith, because the Rangpur schoolboys and their guardians refused to go back on their action in leaving the Government

school and established a school of their own, also an act of faith, and because some leading men of the country recognised that something must be done on the spot to prevent the honour of the nation being tarnished by abandonment of this heroic forlorn hope while others thought it a good opportunity to materialise their educational crotchets. Was this mature deliberation or a compound of faith, idealism and risky experiment? The Boycott came into existence because of the wrath of the people against the Partition and the vehement advocacy of a Calcutta paper which, supported by this general wrath, bore down the hesitations of the thinkers, the politicians and the economists. Almost every step towards Swadeshi, every National school established was an act of faith in the permanence of the movement, a faith not justified by previous experience. These were acts of boldness, often of rashness, not of mature deliberation. Mature deliberation implies that having consulted the lessons of past experience and weighed the probabilities of the future and the possibilities of the present, we take the step which seems most prudent and likely to bring about sure results. The Bombay mill-owners deliberated maturely when they said, "This movement born of a moment's indignation will pass like the rest; go to, let us raise our prices and make hay while the sun shines." The leaders deliberated maturely when they said, "The rush towards National Education will not last and if encouraged it will mean the destruction of private institutions and the payment of a double tax for education." So they stopped the students' strike, withheld their moral support and by this mature deliberation put, like the Bombay mill-owners, almost insuperable obstacles in the way of the movement. It was the unconsciously prepared forces in the country that made their way in spite of and not because of the mature deliberation. It was a minority convinced of the principles of self-help and passive resistance, full of faith, careless of obstacles, believing in the force of ideas, and not the whole self-conscious portion of the country, which mainly contributed, by its eloquence, logic, consistency, self-sacrifice and the impact of its energy on the maturely-deliberating majority, to the permanence of the movement. These are the facts.

As for the conclusion from them we never made the absurd statement evolved out of the *Bengalee's* imagination that God is everywhere except in the conscious and deliberate activities of men. What we say and hold to is that the Divine force manifests itself specially when it effects mighty and irresistible movements which even the ignorance and egoism of man is obliged to recognise as exceeding and baffling his limited wisdom and his limited strength.

Our "Inconsistencies"

A third point is the proposition that out of evil cometh good and that everything that happens or can happen is for the best. Here our contemporary finds an inconsistency, for did we not say that *just now* everything works for the upraising of India because there is an upward trend which all forces assist. "Curiously enough," he says, "the writer thinks the two propositions identical." Curiously enough, we do. We say that just now India is being raised up and everything tends to God's purpose in raising her up, even calamity, even evil, even error. He uses them for His purpose and out of evil bringeth good. We said "just now", because it is not true that God has always raised up India and always there has been an upward trend; sometimes He has cast her down, sometimes there has been a downward trend. Even that was for the good of India and the world as we shall take occasion to show. Where then is the limitation or the inconsistency? The limitation in the phrase "just now" applies to the upward trend, to the particular instance and not to the principle that out of evil cometh good, which is universal and absolute.

Good out of Evil

It is strange to find a philosopher like our contemporary parading in this twentieth century the ancient and hollow platitude that such a doctrine, however true, ought not to be applied to individual conduct because it will abrogate morality and personal responsibility. This is a strange answer, too, to an argument

which simply sought to confirm the faith and endurance of our people in calamity by the belief that our confidence in our future was not mistaken and that these calamities were necessary for God's high purpose. The evil we spoke of was not moral evil, but misfortune and calamity. But we do not shrink from the doctrine that sin also is turned to His purposes and, so far as that goes, we do not see how such a doctrine abrogates morality. The wisdom and love of God in turning our evil into His good does not absolve us of our moral responsibility. Our contemporary shows this want of connection between the two positions himself when he asks whether one should not in that case play the traitor in order to assist the progress of the tendency. The gibe shows up the absurdity not of our faith but of his argument. Our selfish or sinful acts, our persistence in ignorance or perversity are for the best in this obvious sense that God makes out of them excellent material for the work He is about, which always tends to the good of humanity. The persecution of Christianity by the powers of the ancient world was utterly evil, but it was for the best; without it there could not have been that noble reaction of sublime and exalted suffering which finally permeated the human mind with the impulse of sacrifice for high ideals, and by introducing a mental soil fit for the growth of altruism sowed the seeds of love, sweetness and humanity in that hard selfish lust-ridden European world. The *Bengalee* no doubt would have counselled the Christian martyrs not to be so rash and unreasoning but to demand from God a balance of profit and loss for each individual sacrifice and only after mature deliberation decide whether to obey the voice of God in their conscience or offer flowers to Venus and divine homage to Nero.

Loss of Courage

But the question of self-sacrifice needs separate handling and we have not the space to deal with it in this issue as its importance deserves. The *Bengalee* counters our suggestion about the superfluity of prudence and the instinct of self-preservation at the present moment by the assertion that there is an excess

of unreasoning rashness. That is a question of standpoint and vocabulary. But when the *Bengalee* goes on to say that when evil results ensue from their imprudence the rash and unreasoning lose heart and become unbelievers, we have a right to ask to whom the allusion is directed. In the young, the forward, the men stigmatised by the *Bengalee* as rash and unreasoning we find no loss of courage or faith but only a hesitation on what lines to proceed now that the old means have been broken by repressive laws. Among the older men we do indeed find a spirit of depression for which we blame those who in the face of the repressions drew in their horns out of mature deliberation and allowed silence and inactivity to fall on the country. But these were never men of faith. We who believe in God's dispensations have not lost heart, we have not become unbelievers. Our cry is as loud as before for Swaraj and Swadeshi; our hearts beat as high.

Intuitive Reason

However there is hope for our contemporary. He has admitted in his idea of rationality the place of the intuitive reason, and it is precisely the intuitive reason, speaking oftenest in the present stage of human development through the inspiration that wells up from the heart, which is the basis of faith and exceeds the limits of the logical intellect. For this is the highest form of faith when the intuitive reason speaks to the heart, captures the emotions and is supported by reflection. This is the faith that moves mountains and there is nothing higher and more powerful except the yet deeper inner knowledge.