THE CRUX OF THE INDIAN PROBLEM

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BY

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PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

THIS book was written originally for the Indian public. Its purpose is to reveal to Indians the true causes of national suffering and unrest, the real obstacles to advance in social welfare and political strength. It goes deeper than the features of Indian life generally discussed in this connection, and touches fundamental issues of faith and tradition which the majority of reformers are prone to ignore or evade.

Dr. Paranjpye has had a distinguished career in the field of education, and his work on the India Council has brought him into intimate contact with all shades of opinion, both in the East and in the West, on the problem of India. Writing as a "thorough-going nationalist," he has a keen sympathy with the aspirations of his countrymen, and he combines it with a profound conviction that the current ideas of religion form the great stumbling-block in the way of Indian progress. Until these ideas are modified or abandoned he sees little hope of true peace and prosperity being attained.

No small measure of courage is needed to

declare such a conviction and to expound the reasons for it with the freshness and candour which Dr. Paranjpye adopts in the following pages. He has, in fact, thrown down an uncompromising challenge to the established order of Indian thought and custom, in the hope that the truth as he sees it will, however unwelcome the first shock it produces, become in time accepted as the basis of action.

The interest and responsibility of Great Britain in the Indian Problem are so great that Dr. Paranjpye's message comes with hardly less force to an English audience than to the one for which it was primarily intended.

INTRODUCTORY

If one looks below the surface of actual events in India, one is inevitably led to the conclusion that the excessive deference to authority in all spheres, and the slight regard paid to the reasoning faculty, are the main characteristics of the Indian people and the cause of most of the troubles from which their country is suffering.

In the domain of what is called religion this statement needs hardly any elaboration. The infinite number of religions and religious sects; the immense influence of priests, moulvis, *et hoc genus omne*; the multiplicity of temples, mosques, and other places of worship; the wealth squandered on funeral ceremonies and tombs; the complexity and expensiveness of various religious ceremonies even when all real meaning has disappeared from them—all these show that religion is the all-pervading element in Indian society.

The same exaggerated importance of authority is, however, observable in other domains of human activity. Antiquated methods are rigidly adhered to in industry

and agriculture simply because they have the sanction of prescription. In matters of social usage or custom the question is not what is right, expedient, or useful, but what is prescribed by the holy texts or religious leaders, or even by current prejudice. In politics the same kind of absurd importance is attached to personalities rather than to principles and methods. In examining the contents of any Indian newspaper one is struck by the amount of space given to trivial accounts of personal happenings, meetings of congratulation or condolence, celebration of anniversaries of the birth or death of more or less celebrated notabilities of the past, and demonstrations in honour of some popular hero. The whole year is full of festivals supposed to commemorate some legendary or mythological person ; business and work are seriously impeded by the fortuitous occurrence of these interruptions.

The joint family system provides one more illustration of the same principle of subservience to authority. Similar ideas are imbibed in greater or less degree by the foreign officials, who prefer to play the rôle of *mabap* to the people rather than that of leaders seeking to persuade or convince by appeal to reason. Consequently they are liable to chafe under the criticism of the educated classes in the councils and newspapers.

The main object of this little book is to show that only by the spread of Rationalism and by the decline of the reign of authority can real and rapid progress be expected in India.

It must not be assumed that some of the evils mentioned as existing in India are peculiar to that country. Similar facts can be related about almost any other country. The only difference is that elsewhere the scale is much smaller than in India. In fact it may be said that the position and progress of any people are directly proportional to the hold which reason has over them. The relative backwardness, broadly speaking, of the Roman Catholic countries in the West is due to the fact that they are under the influence of a powerful organisation claiming supreme authority over the thoughts and actions of the people. In the so-called Protestant countries the religious organisation is, in the first place, split into many sections; and secondly, the generality of the people regard these conflicting bodies with indifference if not with half-disguised contempt.

Even in these lands we see several movements of an anti-rational character—*e.g.*, Fundamentalism or Christian Science; and although these form only a side stream in the broad currents of national life, the work of the Rationalist is by no means complete.

He has to carry on a continuous strife against the forces of reaction, obscurantism, and that intellectual inertia to which the human mind is but too ready to succumb.

We shall, however, confine ourselves generally to Indian conditions, as the claim of Rationalism is rarely heard in India, on account of the more insistent demands of a militant nationalism. We may remark, in passing, that not only is Rationalism not antagonistic to a sane nationalism, but that it will immensely help in building up a united, prosperous, and self-respecting India.

THE CRUX OF THE INDIAN PROBLEM

STAGNATION AND GROWTH

THE principle of authority, by its very nature, implies stagnation wherever it may be applied. It lays down definite rules formulated by some past or extraneous agency ; therefore growth or change to suit new conditions is checked, if not altogether prevented. Of course, no human institution follows out all the logical consequences of its fundamental conception, and even the most hide-bound societies display some signs of adaptation to environment. But it makes all the difference in the world whether this adaptation takes place easily or only at the cost of an enormous expenditure of energy which could be better utilised.

Let us take an illustration from the political field. It is a fair point for argument whether an able, conscientious, and

public-spirited despot or dictator may not at a particular moment conduce to the greatest amount of well-being in a country. But the ideas of even such a superman may not necessarily prove an efficient guide for long. He may come to think that the people should have implicit faith in his good intentions and accept what he thinks best for them; he may be confronted with new conditions to which he is not accustomed; he may get old, or the elasticity of his mental powers may diminish while his greed of power remains unabated. New rivals may appear who were unknown in the earlier days of his régime. Above all, he will be lucky if he completes his career before the discontent against him is able to raise its head.

It is, in fact, the universal lesson of history that very few great dictators have died quietly in their beds, and that hardly any one of them has been able to pass on the succession peacefully to his son. The departure of such a dictator is generally the occasion for a long period of tumult and agitation which is hardly compensated for

by the temporary prosperity enjoyed in earlier years.

On the other hand, we see that a reasonably efficient constitutional government, although it may not be able to boast of the glories (whatever they really were) of the rule of an Akbar, a Cromwell, a Cæsar, or a Mussolini, contains within itself the machinery for its improvement or its adaptation to altered circumstances. Hence political thought is not likely, in spite of some temporary happenings in present-day world politics, to support the abolition of constitutional democracy in favour of dictatorship. In other words, democracy is dynamic in its nature, while autocracy is merely static.

The same line of argument applies to the realms of morals, intellect, and social science.

In a society where the relations of the sexes had been very loose it was probably a very great reform to get a general acceptance of the principle that a man should have no more than four wives on condition that all the four were treated exactly alike. But when this principle became embodied in

holy writ it became very difficult to get polygamy condemned by law, though in practice its abuses were recognised and the implied condition of equality of treatment could never be observed.

Again, when the usual remedies against disease consisted of the ministrations of a witch-doctor or a priest, it was indeed a great gain to add to these ministrations some empirical medicines or simple surgical operations. But when such new methods, being once accepted, became part and parcel of a new Veda, and thus acquired a supernatural significance, the science of medicine refused to profit by new discoveries or the knowledge and experience of other peoples. Even now we see in India the solid prejudice against modern medicine, and read of continual battles between indigenous and Western systems, when the proper way would be to keep pace with the progress of medical and surgical science, always retaining what is best in the indigenous systems.

When the fingers and toes were the only aids to computation, the use of the *abacus* was indeed a great step forward; but it

would have been absurd to continue the use of the *abacus* when the decimal system of notation was introduced. Newton was indeed a pioneer when he developed the system of fluxions; but the almost divine authority attached to Newton's work in England and the rigid adherence to his methods kept British mathematics in the background for over a century, while on the Continent immense progress was being made by means of the new methods of Euler, Lagrange, the Bernoullis, and others. It required a great campaign on the part of Babbage and his contemporaries early in the nineteenth century to substitute "pure *d*-ism for the old *dot*age."

The consequences of the reign of authority are still graver in matters broadly called religious, as these claim to belong to an absolutely distinct order of ideas. Any questioning of authority here is regarded not only as a sign of intellectual rebellion, but as a kind of moral and social enormity, so great that for many long centuries almost all the peoples of the world have been convinced that it should be suppressed with all

possible rigour. Imprisonment, torture, and death by every conceivable method have been used to uphold religious authority. Wars have been fought to decide between conflicting theories about the nature of God and the powers and functions of religious leaders. The Inquisition tried for many years to suppress by fire and sword any questioning of the dogmas of the existing faith.

Indeed, intolerance and religious persecution form the most lamentable feature of the whole history of the human race. No country or people is free from it. From the most uncivilised savages in the wilds of Africa to the most civilised nations of Europe and America we can read the same story of intolerance, physical and mental persecution, and the fettering of the innate capacities of the human mind. What a different world we should now have if there had been no such obstacles to progress through the free use of reason!

It is not our purpose, however, to indulge in vain regrets for the past, but to look to the future and try to ensure that hence-

forward, at any rate, these fetters shall be broken, and the capabilities of the human mind shall have the fullest scope. Whatever progress the world has made since *homo sapiens* was fully differentiated from his anthropoid ancestors has been due to the use of his reasoning faculty. The ape goes on doing things by instinct alone. Man prides himself on the possession and use of reason ; he thinks he can consciously affect his surroundings. In so far as he allows any external authority to circumscribe the use of his reason, he is allowing his distinctive human nature to be reduced to the level of the brute creation and the possible growth of his own and future generations to be retarded.

RATIONALISM AND RELIGION

RATIONALISM has been defined as "the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority."

In these words the Rationalist movement explains the ideal which it seeks to further. It believes that by the universal adoption of this attitude humanity will make very rapid progress, and that the sum of human happiness in the world will increase and the aggregate of pain and misery will vastly diminish. A person with this mental attitude will, on the whole, be better fitted for his environment and will increase his own human value and render his maximum contribution to the well-being of his fellows.

Rationalism, in other words, is correct thinking, the full use of the faculty of

reason with which man is endowed. A Rationalist is prepared to face all problems and bring his reason to bear on them to the best of his ability. If he is unable to solve any of them, he is not prepared to accept so-called solutions that do not stand the test of his reason, but is content for the moment to acknowledge his ignorance. He has a profound hope that with time the bounds of human knowledge and experience will gradually get wider and wider; and he refuses to say of any subject whatever: "Thus far and no farther shalt thou go." He declines absolutely to be bound by the fiat of any extraneous authority in any intellectual, moral, or social domain.

A Rationalist is, however, not to be confounded with an anarchist. The Rationalist is prepared to accept provisional conclusions when they are not inconsistent with any facts within his cognisance; but he is always equally ready to give up those conclusions when new facts are discovered which do not fit in with them. Nay, further, he tacitly accepts the responsibility for discovering new facts whenever he can,

and in any case is not deterred from pursuing his research by the possibility of coming across new unpleasant facts. As a unit of society he accepts such of the prevailing customs as are not contrary to his reason. He is even prepared to examine sympathetically any such custom, on the ground that its existence may have had some rational basis in some particular set of circumstances. The vast field of human history is part of the data on which he seeks to build his future. But he is sure that the book of human history can never be closed and is being continually enlarged. His quarrel is with the man who maintains that the word *finis* has been written on certain sections of that history, and that all that is hereafter possible for him to do is to annotate these closed sections.

While the Rationalist principle is applied to every phase of human activity, its particular object for attack for the present is bound to be the theological spirit which pervades and holds in fetters all portions of the human race in greater or less degree. I use the word " theological " in preference

to " religious," as the latter word has varying meanings with different persons, and no definition of the word " religion " has yet been generally accepted. If an advocate of religion can be brought to discuss such matters with a Rationalist at all, it is generally found that his religion becomes gradually sublimated into vague aspirations for humanity's future, a lively realisation of the limits of human knowledge on ultimate concepts, or even a mere enunciation of the basis of ethical rules and practices. But at the back of the mind of such an advocate of religion there remain such dogmas as the efficacy of prayer, the observance of various mechanical religious practices, or belief in a prophet or a saviour who is all-powerful and who can interfere at will in the ordinary course of nature.

The Rationalist, on the other hand, has not only aspirations for humanity's future, but hopes of the continuous and unlimited progress of mankind, for which he is prepared to work strenuously. The Rationalist not only realises that knowledge of ultimate concepts has its limits, but, being aware of

the futility of any search after them, devotes his attention all the more readily to those subjects which are within the range of the human mind. He has a firmer hold over the principles of morality, since for him these principles are based on the facts of human nature and not on the commandments of any authority or scripture. By him, moreover, even moral principles are no longer regarded as static in nature, but share the dynamic quality of continuous progress and adaptation. Thus they become more of a living reality than they can be to the servile follower of time-worn creeds and shibboleths.

The theological spirit is, in fact, the very antithesis of the spirit of modern science. The protagonists of theology have done their best to strangle or control the march of science in all ages and in all countries. They have gradually had to give way, and are often ashamed of the part that their predecessors took in this conflict. On many points they have had to accept the new positions, however unwillingly, but are still prepared to fight every inch of fresh ground.

Their hold over the common people is still enormous, and they strive to strengthen it in every possible way. Whenever science honestly declares its inability for the moment to offer a solution they are ready to supply one, however illogical.

On the ultimate questions of philosophy —"How?" "Why?" "Whither?"—the Rationalist is content to acknowledge his ignorance. He feels that the facts of consciousness are the data of his being, and that it is very probably impossible for his limited faculties to apprehend anything of the infinite or the absolute. The theological expert, on the other hand, is ready to make endless assumptions which are in the nature of things incapable of verification. He looks with contempt on the Rationalist who candidly acknowledges his inability to say how or by whom the world was created.

The religious view is that the universe shows signs of a conscious purpose running through it all. Leaving aside for the moment the legitimate retort that the very recognition of this conscious purpose arises from his own consciousness, such a purpose

does not necessarily imply an ultimate creator. A proximate creator one can perhaps grasp intellectually; but the idea of an ultimate creator is beyond the scope of the finite human mind. By observing the working of a gramophone we may say that it must have been made by somebody out of various materials. From a study of these materials we can go back to the iron manufacturer; and from the iron manufacturer back to the miner who extracted the ores from the bowels of the earth. From the earth we can go back to the sun; thence to the nebula. Science may take some steps even further back, but it seems impossible that this chain can be finally closed.

Beyond a certain point we enter the region of unverified and unverifiable theories, and the best position seems to be to stop at the limits marked by the solid foundation of reason. The theist considers the retort, "Who made God?" as flippant and sacrilegious. But there is really no answer to this question, and the agnostic position of Rationalists is assuredly the most logical that can be taken.

Postulating the existence of God and clothing him with certain attributes which are generally those of an ideal man as he imagines him, the theist proceeds to raise an elaborate superstructure which he considers to be the only true solution of the problem of the universe. If he is confronted with unpleasant facts which do not fit in with this solution, he either refuses to accept them or proceeds to construct a further labyrinth in which he gets more and more lost. An all-powerful and all-beneficent God is inconsistent with the existence of pain and evil in the world which he himself is supposed to have created, and of whose properties and future behaviour he must have been thoroughly cognisant. He must therefore be either not all-powerful or not all-beneficent. Nor is the problem of pain and evil brought any nearer solution by assuming the existence of a devil in addition to a God. There arise immediately the unanswerable questions: "Who created the Devil?" "Cannot God change his evil mentality?" "Why does not God kill the Devil?" It is all an intellectual

tangle, and the best way is to keep out of it altogether.

Similar considerations of the most obvious character apply to the doctrine of Karma, which lies at the root of Hinduism and allied religions and is enunciated with the object of explaining the existence of pain and evil in the world. If the pain you suffer now is the consequence of some misdeeds you committed in a former existence, you can legitimately ask: Why was I tempted in that existence to commit those misdeeds? Then you are taken back to a still further existence, and so on, into the remotest past. But even assuming the usual number (8,400,000) of different kinds of lives, the questions still remain: What happened in the first of these, and why? How did the series of events leading to pain and evil first begin?

The only acceptable answer is that it is all "behind the veil, behind the veil!" of human knowledge and consciousness.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

UNABLE to convince the Rationalist that the ideas of God or Karma can be logically defended, the theologian shifts his ground and maintains that, whether logical or not, his theories serve to keep the wheels of society going smoothly, and that belief in them is necessary to save the world from moral chaos. Thus in his opinion religious belief is a kind of auxiliary police.

To this contention several answers may be given, all equally valid.

In the first place, is it true that the wheels of society do go smoothly when almost everybody is a devout believer? Does not unthinking belief in religion and dogma generally go with misery, oppression, immorality, and selfishness? Are not unthinking believers generally backward and unprogressive? Was not slavery a flourishing institution in the heyday of religious fervour in many countries? Were not

terrible wars fought in the very cause of religion ? Is the position of woman satisfactory among the most religious people in the world, like the Muslims or the Hindus ? Are not racial pride and superiority seen at their highest in the southern states of U.S.A., where Fundamentalism also flourishes ? Do the ministers of religion themselves afford so very much superior examples of a better life ?

Again, do not these theories of supernaturalism themselves create new kinds of moral and physical suffering ? The various beliefs about God, spirits, devils, ghosts, cause in many sensitive persons intense moral suffering. The absurd importance attached to asceticism has led to innumerable abuses. Sati, human sacrifices, fasts, flagellations, mutilations, the celibacy of the clergy—all these and many other practices are derived from various religious beliefs, and have been a fruitful source of human misery. The colossal wealth lavished on the building of churches, temples, mosques, and tombs would have added greatly to the happiness of mankind if

rationally used. Again, all communal quarrels and riots in India are directly due to belief in various religions.

It is indeed rash to say that religious beliefs have, on balance, increased the sum-total of human happiness. The contrary is certainly the fact in India.

The ordinary man, it is asserted, requires certain sanctions for various rules of morality and social behaviour, and these are most easily furnished by theories about God, Karma, and other religious concepts. If, it is urged, these sanctions are taken away, his moral foundations would be destroyed, and he would become altogether non-moral, if not immoral.

We do not agree that such hypothetical sanctions are required for the rules of morality. Human nature contains within itself certain impulses which lead man to observe the principles of morality. The experience of humanity over thousands of years has shown that, taken broadly, truth, love, and charity have conduced to the general good, while their opposites have led to unhappiness and evil.

Moreover, if we base correct conduct on false or unverified theories there is always the danger that any shaking of belief in these theories is likely also to shake this correct conduct. Take the case of temperance. In India especially, temperance advocates generally rely on various religious injunctions which, among both Hindus and Mahomedans, forbid the use of alcohol. During the earlier days of English education the belief in orthodox religion was shaken in the case of many, and they took to drinking to excess as a demonstration of their religious emancipation. Had the advantages of abstinence from alcohol been fixed in their minds by perfectly valid reasons based on the science of physiology, the excesses would not have resulted.

Man is, on the whole, an imitative animal: he will follow the ordinary rules of social behaviour not because they are founded on certain theories, but because he sees others about him doing the same. He likes to be thought well of by his fellows, and his inherited instincts and the habits acquired

from his earliest days will continue to keep him to correct ways of life.

Experience in other countries where the hold of religion is gradually getting weaker and weaker leads to the same conclusion. In countries like England, France, and Germany, only a very small minority actually believe in the Christian religion, but there has been no slackening of the principles of morality. On the other hand, patriotism, public spirit, truthfulness, kindliness, tolerance, and the desire for social improvement have certainly increased; and the same results can be expected in India, even if belief in religion diminishes to the point of disappearance.

There are others who object to Rationalism as a "cold materialistic" attitude, which takes no account of the finer elements of human nature like beauty, love, or a sense of the grandeur of Nature and the universe. This is an entirely false charge against Rationalism, for Rationalists take all these aspects of human nature into account before forming their judgments. Æsthetic and

emotional factors are given their full value as a means of enriching human life, and the Rationalist's recognition of their importance is none the less eager because he sees the universe as an expression of uniform laws to which no miraculous exception is possible.

The theologian, by his belief in miracles or arbitrary interference with the order of nature, detracts from the grandeur of a universal and unvarying natural order. It is because the Rationalist believes in a perfectly ordered universe that he becomes aware of its infinite magnificence and is always attempting to fathom its secrets further and further. If at the will of the Creator the sun can be made to stand still in the heavens, the science of astronomy will lose all its meaning, and the beauty of the growing conception of the order and the immensity of the universe will be unrealisable. If new species of animals can be created by God in the twinkling of an eye, the science of heredity and the inspiring conception of an orderly evolution of the animal and vegetable kingdoms will become

meaningless. It is, indeed, the Rationalist who cherishes the noblest and most inspiring ideals, and tries to attain them not by vain prayers, but by patient inquiry and intelligent exertion.

Further, does experience really prove that those who do not believe in the accepted ideas of religion have been less devoted to high purposes? Many of our great poets, philosophers, and reformers were charged with heterodoxy and suffered persecution in pursuit of their exalted aims. Time and again the forces of religion have stifled the healthy human desire for a richer and more beautiful existence. At least one prominent religion forbids the art of sculpture as tending to idolatry. The Puritans were well known for the zeal with which they destroyed the images of saints in churches; can it be said that they were not truly religious? The love of beauty is a deep instinct in the human mind, which found expression even with the cave man long before the present religions were born; it will continue to exist long after they have disappeared. Perhaps the forms in which

it manifests itself will be different, but there need be no fear that if humanity sheds its superstitions the world will be drab and materialistic, without art, beauty, and the higher emotions.

THE MINISTERS OF RELIGION

IF religion consisted merely of unverifiable theories its discussion might perhaps have been safely left to philosophers or metaphysicians. But the ordinary man cannot shut his eyes to the fact that every religion, even the purest and most abstract in its original form, has a way of giving birth to a special class for its administration. This class, besides being entirely parasitic and not contributing to the economic resources of society, has always tended to retard progress and to hold the people in intellectual, and often physical, chains.

A vast organisation has thus been everywhere created with a relentless ambition to preserve its own influence. Popes, bishops, parsons, monks, and nuns in the case of Christianity ; high priests, moulvis, kazis, and faqirs in the case of Islam ; shankaracharyas, priests, gurus, sadhus, ascetics, and religious beggars in the case of Hindu-

ism—all these and similar classes in other religions form in each country or society a numerous powerful body whose one object, conscious and unconscious, is its own aggrandisement—an object which can be achieved only by keeping the minds and hearts of their followers in bondage.

Even when the founder of a religion expressly forbade the accumulation of wealth or the excessive enjoyment of the material things of life, within a few years the ministers of his religion forgot these injunctions, and, with his name forever on their lips, proceeded to organise themselves for ends utterly opposed to those he advocated.

The priestly class in all countries shows a love of temporal power and exerts itself to acquire it in all possible ways. While Christ is declared to have preached the merits of poverty, saying that it is much easier for the poor than for the rich to go to heaven, the organised churches have amassed immense wealth.

In Spain, it is stated, one-third of the landed property of the country belongs to the Church. In India, although the original

Shankaracharya was a poor man, the successors of his *maths* are continually fighting over questions of property and endowments, and dragging each other before the secular law courts. Similar phenomena are seen among the representatives of other religions in India. Even murders by the heads of religious denominations on account of disputes about property are not unknown.

The original founders of these religions are known to have lived a very simple life, but the present leaders flaunt their rich vestments, gold crosses, and jewelled tiaras.

Let me recall a typical illustration of the way in which these religious heads extract money from the faithful. A Shankaracharya was on a visitation near my village, and sent his emissaries to me to inquire whether I would like to have the honour of a visit from him so as to give me an opportunity of washing his feet. On inquiring what it would cost, a tariff was quoted, giving one charge if he came in a mere palanquin and a greater one if he came on an elephant, for elephants were not often seen by our villagers. Needless to say, I

did not accept the honour of a visit from his holiness.

The sale of indulgences is well known to the readers of European history. Payments for masses for the dead are common in Catholic countries. In India it is supposed to be meritorious to perform certain ceremonies at the holy city of Gaya for the benefit of the souls of dead ancestors. The *mahant* or the chief priest of the place takes full advantage of the credulity of the devout, and makes them pay large amounts, often beyond their means, before his holiness comes on the scene in gorgeous raiment and utters the requisite words: "May your ancestors go to heaven."

One of the ways by which the priestly class contrive to retain the faith of their followers is through the use of words from dead or archaic languages. They hold that there is some special merit in the very sound of these words, apart altogether from their sense. In ancient India the Vedic words were considered so sacred that it was counted a crime for a man of the depressed classes even to hear the recitation of the

Vedas; molten lead was to be poured into his ears if he accidentally heard them. In Roman Catholic countries prayers are said in Latin, which the generality of the people do not understand. In Greece it is said that the New Testament is still ordinarily used in the ancient Greek and not in modern Greek translation, for that would be against true religion. In Protestant England people rhapsodise on the beauty of the language of the Bible, which is now over three hundred years old and differs a good deal from the current speech. The Koran is still read in Arabic, though most of the Mahomedans in India and Persia do not understand Arabic.

One of the great difficulties confronting educational administrators in India in their efforts to extend education among the backward Muslim population is that the children must first be taught to read the Koran mechanically. Special *mulla* schools have been opened in Sind so that the objection to education on the score of religion may disappear by getting the *mullas* or the ministers in charge of the village mosques to organise these schools themselves,

although they are usually hardly qualified to give much instruction in secular subjects.

Among the Hindus all sacred writings are in Sanskrit, which is unintelligible to the common people. Prayers are said in this language, and all religious ceremonies are performed by reciting Sanskrit *mantras*. There is in this case a further complication. The older sacred books, called the Vedas, are written in a very archaic form of Sanskrit, on whose correct interpretation even scholars are not always in agreement. The three twice-born castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya) have their religious ceremonies performed by means of Vedic *mantras*, while the Shudra caste has its ceremonies in Pauranic *mantras* (*i.e.*, in comparatively modern Sanskrit of the great epics, puranas, and other Sanskrit literature). One would have thought that at least some would understand the last, and would therefore prefer them to the Vedic *mantras*. But no ! The status of a caste is raised by their use, and many castes which for long had been content to be born, married, or cremated with the help of Pauranic texts have within the

last fifty years claimed to be given the benefit of the Vedic texts and thus be automatically raised to the status of the twice-born.

The Brahmin–non-Brahmin controversy in Bombay began with the new claim of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, a descendant of the great Shivaji, to Vedic rites. As his Brahmin hereditary priest refused to allow this heterodox innovation, his *watan* (or hereditary property and allowance) was confiscated, and the dispute became more and more acrimonious until it acquired a first-class political importance.

This controversy about Vedic and Pauranic rites remains unsettled, in spite of the fact that anybody, even a non-Hindu, can buy the whole *corpus* of the Vedas for a few rupees and say whatever Vedic *mantras* he likes. But common sense is not a strong point among the priestly caste.

The Parsees, even after thirteen hundred years' residence in India, continue to say their prayers in ancient Iranian languages, though scholars do not agree in their interpretation, and the languages are certainly unknown to the ordinary Parsee.

A little to the south of Bombay there was a small community, now spread over various parts, which for many centuries were regarded as practically a part of the Hindus. They were called *telis* or oil pressers, on account of their chief occupation. This community continued to conduct its prayers and religious ceremonies in a peculiar language, and it was less than a hundred years ago that a missionary, Dr. Wilson of Bombay, while studying its customs, discovered that the language was a corrupt form of Hebrew. The community, now known as Ben-i-Israels, has been recognised as descended from certain Jews who emigrated to India in the early centuries of the Christian era. The members speak pure Marathi for all ordinary purposes, but still continue to use Hebrew for religious purposes.

Elaborate ritual is an essential instrument whereby priests and ministers of religion everywhere seek to strengthen the faith of their followers and inspire awe among them. It is common among all people and takes various forms. Special articles of dress, like surplices and clerical collars, serve to empha-

sise the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Various articles of worship, often of very costly material, are used and guarded most devoutly; any interference with them is considered sacrilegious and punished as a criminal offence. The disputes between High and Low Church in England are notorious; they turn upon matters of ritual which to an ordinary mind appear mere trifles.

In India religion for the common man consists mainly of mere ritual, and any alteration in it is regarded as deadly heresy. The tending of the images of gods, their daily washing, clothing, and anointing, form a great part of the priests' duties. The image is supposed to have all the physical and mental needs of a human being, and the priests' function is to see that all these needs are satisfied. The faithful are expected to make rich offerings to the image, and these become the perquisites of the priests, though not always without disputes which the courts of law are called upon to settle. The god is alleged to experience the usual ills of mankind; it falls sick at regular

intervals, and on particular days it even dies. In some temples the god requires a wife or several wives, and ignorant people often dedicate to the temple their little girls, who become the nominal servants or wives of the god, but are in actual practice the mistresses of the priests and their friends.

In recent years, when an effort was made to prevent by law this practice of the dedication of girls to temples, the orthodox raised a hue and cry against it as an interference with the religion of the people. The Government of Bombay actually reported against the proposed reform. Fortunately the Madras Legislature has lately passed a law—on the motion of a woman member of the Council—making this dedication illegal.

All religious ceremonies consist of complicated ritual, which the priest is careful to observe. The making of the altar; the collection of various pieces of the twigs of particular trees (*samidhā*), bunches of different kinds of grass (*darbha* and *durvā*), flowers and leaves of special trees and plants, rice, and ghee—all these form an essential

preparation for religious ceremonies. While a Brahmin is performing them according to the dictation of the priest (generally in Sanskrit, for the priest recites words on behalf of the actual performer, who is only required to say at intervals the word *mama*, or mine) he has on various occasions to change the position of his sacred thread from under the left arm to the right, or *vice versa*. It would require a volume to describe in detail even a single religious ceremony.

This kind of complicated ritual is seen everywhere. A service in a Roman Catholic church appears to a non-Catholic to consist of mere mechanical processes, though to the devout it seems to have a deep symbolical significance. The special intonation adopted in the chanting of prayers appears very similar in the case of all religious ministers, Catholic, Muslim, Parsee, Jew, or Hindu; it is designed to serve the special purpose of inspiring profound awe among the faithful. The Christian Communion, which involves the drinking of alcohol, is to the Hindu as objectionable as the partaking of the five

products of the cow on occasions of ceremonial purification would be to the European.

If such absurdities are common among the more enlightened, one can conceive to what lengths ritual can go among the less enlightened. And all this is defended by the protagonists of religion as tending towards a higher life, as being indispensable for the continuance of a stable social order, and as entitling the performers to a specially delectable existence hereafter. Well has Voltaire said :—

Nos prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple pense,
Notre credulité fait toute leur science.

("Our priests are not what the people fondly believe them to be ; it is only our credulity that makes them all-wise.")

It may be presumed by some that the practice of the so-called higher religious life by the priests is at least likely to make them better citizens, more unselfish in character, and more moral in their conduct. But this is far from being the case. The

abuses of monasteries in the Middle Ages, including the escapades of highest church dignitaries, are well known.

Even in these days one reads of cases in Protestant England itself where clergymen are convicted of crimes utterly incompatible with their sacred character. The celibacy of the priesthood in many sects surely tends to their demoralisation, and is in practice far from affording the guarantee of sanctity it is alleged to provide.

In India the religious heads of several sects claimed till recently the *jus primæ noctis*, and the Maharaj Libel Case gave rise to a first-class scandal among the rich Bhatia community of Bombay a few years ago. In fact, I do not think that the average moral standard of a professional priest is at all higher than that of an average lay person of the same social level and with the same educational opportunities. If religion is to be defended apart from any rational proof, and simply on the score of its favourable influence on character and conduct, the life of its ministers shows that the defence is exceedingly weak.

DEATH

THE trump card of the advocates of religion is its supposed efficacy in reconciling man to the phenomenon of death.

To the average man death is such an inexplicable event that it becomes invested with all kinds of vague terror. The fear of death makes the most heroic among us quail and do things we would not otherwise do. Sociologically the awe inspired by death is on the whole a beneficial influence; a society which regarded death as of no more importance than any ordinary event would not function satisfactorily. Human life is a desirable thing, and it is the duty of everybody to preserve it as long as possible. But the evolution of life in all its forms has really depended upon an energetic striving for continued existence. If there had not been this intense instinct at work everywhere, consciously and unconsciously, life would have disappeared from the world long ago.

Human curiosity is unappeasable on the question of the beginning and end of life. Perhaps scientists may some day be able to create protoplasm in the laboratory, but the association of consciousness with this protoplasm in the aggregations forming the higher animals is for the present an insoluble problem, and appears likely to remain so for ever. Whether there is a spirit which can be dissociated from matter is not a question which we shall discuss in this place. This much is certain, that the actual manifestations of spirit can be recognised only through the medium of matter. Even acts of consciousness are, according to physiologists, associated with definite changes in certain brain cells.

It appears impossible to form an adequate conception of consciousness without matter. The best course for the ordinary man is to take life as he finds it in himself, and to make the best use of it as his higher natural impulses dictate. Whether life continues in some form or other after death is a question to be decided on scientific evidence. For the moment the evidence, in spite of the

researches of spiritualists, appears to be insufficient. In any case the question is not to be decided by the unverified words of men who lived ages ago, and who certainly did not proceed by scientific methods, but merely expressed their own hopes, aspirations, and fears.

The various religions have themselves added to the fear of death by their fantastic theories about it, and the absurd and elaborate ceremonial associated with funerals. The doctrines of hell, purgatory, and resurrection ; of innumerable rebirths ; of eternal punishment ; of the continued existence of the soul with ideas and desires similar to those of real life—all these have led to practices and customs which have added to the pain and suffering inevitable on the final snapping of human associations.

The treatment of the human body after death varies among people of different religions, but in all cases the proper ceremonial is regarded as of supreme importance for the soul of the departed. The opposition in Christian countries to the sensible method of

the disposal of the dead by cremation is the result of the doctrine of resurrection. Large amounts, which the survivors can ill afford, are spent on tombs and memorials. Cemeteries permanently occupy desirable sites in congested areas, and, besides being a danger to the health of the population, are expensive to maintain. Elaborate monuments are raised to the dead in Islamic countries ; and these, though often of great beauty, have involved immense hardship on the survivors. The vast wealth lavished on ancient Egyptian tombs and pyramids must have required the sweated labour of thousands of slaves. Funeral feasts and other ceremonies among the Hindus in India have pauperised many a family ; and grief at the loss of the dear one must be aggravated by the thought of long-continued debts which have to be incurred for the performance of the necessary funeral rites and entertainments.

The actual ceremonies at funerals among the Hindus appear quite absurd to one who has not been brought up with these ideas. Before the funeral pyre is lighted every

provision has to be made for the safe passage of the soul to the other world. Food has to be cooked for the required oblations; clothes, at least in a symbolical form, must be given in charity; a cow has to be given away to provide milk for the departed soul; and in former days the widow had to be burnt with the body so that the man might not pass his life hereafter in solitude. The sons must shave off their moustaches, and the widow should have her head shaved—with the double object of keeping her chaste in her widowhood by the loss of her beauty and of providing the soul with a rope of hair for ascent to heaven.

The soul is supposed to hover round the old haunts of the living for some days, and various kinds of oblations are to be offered for its satisfaction. On one particular day it is considered necessary that a crow should eat the ball of rice provided, and if none comes forward to eat it the soul is considered to be in great distress and has some worldly wish still ungratified. The survivors try to guess his supposed desires and promise to carry them out faithfully; often they wait

for hours for the crow to come. If even then it does not put in an appearance, a symbolical crow is made of *darbha* grass, and the ball of rice is touched with it. In spite of this ingenious substitution, the non-appearance of a real crow is considered to be a dire calamity and a great reflection on the survivors.

The funeral ceremonies continue up to the twelfth day after death. The first anniversary of the death is observed with great *éclat*, and involves the feeding of all the relatives and a large number of Brahmins. While a son is living he has to perform the *shrāddha* on every anniversary. If the family is engaged in agriculture, no animal belonging to the family should be put to work on such anniversary days, since the soul of the dead may have been reincarnated in one of these animals.

Such anthropomorphic ideas about the dead soul are not peculiar to the Hindus; they are common to all peoples, though the actual ceremonies take varying forms. It was very curious to read of a court case about two years ago when a woman univer-

sity graduate in Paignton, an English seaside town, wanted facilities to perform certain ceremonies at the tomb of her mother, including the burning of incense and the cooking of food. Among all peoples there is hardly a sacrilege so bad as desecration of tombs and interference with dead bodies, and one of the most effective items of propaganda against the Germans during the Great War was their supposed extraction of fat from the corpses of the men killed on the battle-field.

If, instead of caring for the souls of the dead, humanity gave the same attention to the well-being of the living, how much better would the world be! The work of every human being lives on in the effects it has upon his fellows. A truly rational attitude on death would scrap all these fantastic ideas and make man happier and less miserable by abolishing this religious exaggeration of the fear of death. Better by far to feed and clothe the living than the dead; far better to provide good housing for the poor and the miserable than to erect magnificent tombs and memorials for those who

have once for all passed beyond the bounds of material needs.

A Rationalist is not a man without ideals ; his ideals relate to his living fellow-beings and not to the imaginary " spirits " of the dead. For that reason they are more likely to be realised ; they are certainly calculated to help human happiness and progress.

COMMUNAL STRIFE

In India the problem of problems is communal strife and jealousy.

In the first place, there are many religions professed in India—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and various aboriginal faiths. Each of these religions is divided into several sects, which often regard each other with greater hatred than they regard other religions—just as two near relatives, when they fall out, are far more bitter against each other than against strangers.

The Hindus have four principal castes, each main caste being divided into innumerable subdivisions. Besides the regular castes there is a vast mass of outcastes or depressed classes, aboriginal classes, and so on.

The Moslems have their *sunnis* and *shiahs*, the Khojas, Memons, Pathans, Persians, etc.

The Christians have their Protestants (split up by many subdivisions) and Roman Catholics; and, although they are not openly acknowledged, the ancient Hindu castes of the Christian converts have not entirely disappeared.

The whole population of India is thus divided into an immense number of more or less water-tight compartments, which make the awakening of a corporate national consciousness difficult if not impossible.

These sectional differences, though not due entirely to religious differences, have become fanatically aggressive on account of their religious foundation. The natural effects of race, language, and climate have been aggravated by this supernatural basis, and the usual forces tending towards the obliteration of barriers have on that account not been allowed to have full play as in other countries. Where would a country like England or France have been if all the separate ethnological elements of their populations had continued to keep aloof from each other for centuries and faced each other as irreconcilable enemies rather than

as fellow citizens ? The hold of religion over the Indian people is so strong that almost every act has come to have a religious significance. It is not by any so-called purification of religion that permanent progress can be attained. It is only by lessening the hold of religion and increasing the hold of reason and common sense that the problem of communal strife in India can be effectively solved.

The incidents that lead to communal strife are not due to what are so fondly regarded by the protagonists of religion as the fundamental problems of philosophy and morals. The matters in dispute are everyday occurrences, many of them superstitious in character. The Muslim does not mind the noise of a train passing by his mosque, but a Hindu procession with music is anathema and leads to a riot. The Hindu, on the other hand, closes his eyes to the fact that vast numbers of cattle are slaughtered every year for the use of the British troops and in slaughter-houses, but a cow taken in procession by Mahomedans on a religious festival immediately leads to

a big blaze. The Brahmin from Madras does not, or cannot, object to a pariah travelling in the same boat or train with him (though if he be very orthodox he may have a bath at the end of his journey to remove the pollution) ; but if the pariah passes through the Brahmin street in a village or draws water from the common tank the Brahmin feels his religion outraged.

The division into various sects is often due to such minute differences in certain matters of form that it would be a matter for laughter if the effects were not so deadly serious. Swift tells us that Lilliput was divided into two warring sections owing to a difference of view as to the proper way of breaking an egg. But the differences between Big-endians and Little-endians were not more trivial than the differences between the two most advanced sections of the Brahmin Community in Madras as to whether the caste mark on the forehead is to be vertical or horizontal. Of course, there might have been at some time a real philosophical difference of opinion between a Shaiva and a Vaishnava, but for the

ordinary man who professes to belong to one or the other sect the only criterion is that the one has a horizontal caste mark and the other a vertical one, for he may not be educated in the philosophy of either sect.

The smallest detail of sanctioned usage or custom comes to be regarded as of deep religious significance. A late President * of the Poona Municipality told me that he once asked one of the municipal sweepers whether, instead of sweeping the roads with very short brooms which required continual bending of the back, he did not consider a broom with a long handle, like those used by sweepers in Bombay, as more convenient for work. He received the reply that the use of a short broom was a custom established by his ancestors, and that any change to new-fangled improvements would be irreligious. The President gave up his idea, as he did not wish to force a strike of the sweepers.

The Hindu castes are based on religion, race, occupation, and locality. The inter-

* Hari Narayan Apte, a distinguished Marathi author.

action of these four principles has given rise to the immense number of castes, but whatever their origin they always acquire a religious colour, and any attempt to interfere with them is opposed as being contrary to religion. While, therefore, new castes occasionally come into existence, there are hardly any signs of the fusion of allied castes.

Some social reformers talk of such fusion, but the opposition they encounter would be no greater if they advocated the complete abolition of all caste. The defender of caste is ready to point to the different classes, based on education and economic position, in other countries, but the Hindu castes differ from these in being absolutely watertight. According to the *Purusha-Sukta*, the original creator—*Purusha*—created the Brahmins from his head, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs, and the Sudras from his feet, thus symbolically representing the division into brain-workers, warriors, craftsmen, and labourers. However, the actual number of castes is now so large that an expert anatomist would find it difficult to assign a proper organ of the

original *Purusha* for the origin of each. No one caste would be likely to get more than a little muscle or a nerve, or even a cell!

Intermarriage between members of different castes is absolutely forbidden. Even interdining is allowed only between members of nearly allied castes. Some of the castes are so microscopic that they do not contain a hundred families; therefore it is often found difficult to find suitable matches for boys and girls. In some the proportion of girls is too high; in others that of boys; and the evils of excessive dowry, sale of girls, polygamy, and unequal marriages are often the consequence.

Moreover, the bar on social relations tends to keep the various castes to themselves, and prejudices and jealousies are rampant. Contemptible epithets are exchanged, and ignoble origins are frequently assigned to rival castes, which are often charged with immoral or even criminal practices. For example, one subsection of the Brahmins in Western India is supposed to indulge in poisoning strangers, and especially their sons-in-law, as sacrifices to a

goddess—a charge that is, needless to say, devoid of any foundation, although some years ago it was so widely believed in by the ignorant that they were afraid of taking even water from a man of that caste.

It is true that with wider education, increased facilities of travel and communication, and greater knowledge of the world outside one's own limited circle, some of the old rigours of caste are gradually disappearing, especially those connected with inter-dining. On the other hand, the ban on intermarriages remains as strong as ever, though signs are not wanting that the education of girls and the rise in their marriage age are likely to loosen even this ban in the course of time, albeit very gradually.

The greatest evil of the caste system and the blackest blot on Hindu society is the degraded state in which the so-called untouchable classes live. Some forty millions of Hindus are beyond the pale of the regular Hindu castes. Their very touch —in some parts even their shadow or sight— is regarded as a pollution which only a full

bath or at least a change to newly-washed clothes is supposed to wipe out. These castes are the descendants of the original non-Aryan inhabitants of India, and have been generally assigned the humbler duties in society. The tendency to subdivide is so strong, however, that these castes themselves are very numerous, and some of them even regard others as untouchables.

Education has, however, begun to act as a leaven even against untouchability, and these classes are beginning to assert themselves. It is particularly noticeable that the abolition of untouchability is one of the main items in Mr. Gandhi's programme, and that the reformed Councils are trying to do something to ameliorate the status of the depressed classes.

The existence of all these divisions naturally acts against the growth of a feeling of nationality and hampers national development. When almost everybody thinks in terms of caste every act is scrutinised for some low communal motive. Demands are advanced for making Government appointments on grounds of caste rather than of

fitness; and even proposals for legislation or executive action are tested by their probable effects on communal balance. The whole political structure of India has to run the gauntlet of a proper adjustment of communal differences. Administration is made more difficult by continual communal strife, and the opponents of national progress are only too ready to use it as a reason for standing still or going back.

The present Government cannot be entirely exonerated from the charge of having done little to assuage communal strife. In some quarters it may be thought that the division among Indians is useful in retaining foreign rule, as this would be superfluous if the Indian people displayed a strong feeling of nationality and a readiness to act together as Indians rather than to fall out as members of different religious communities.

If the religious background of this communal picture could be removed the problem would be much easier of solution. Most Indian nationalists are fond of depicting in bright colours their old civilisation as

founded on a religious instinct, but if they realise that it is this very instinct which has made the problem of Indian progress so difficult of solution, they must inevitably come to the conclusion that no "purification" of the prevailing religion, no going back to the Vedas or to any fancied bygone age, will raise India in the scale of nations.

It is only by a Rationalistic attitude, which looks to the present and the future rather than to the past, which cares for the bodies and minds of the people in this life rather than for the salvation of their souls after death, and which sets the good of mankind before any fancied commands of supernatural beings, that India can permanently attain the place that is her due. The great Voltaire found the Roman Catholic system facing him on every side and declared: "*Ecrasez l'infâme!*" Even with greater reason should the Indian nationalist wage war against the whole system of popular religion and caste, for here stands the obstacle that blocks his way at all points.

RATIONALISM IN ACTION

WE have adopted the definition of Rationalism as a certain attitude of mind, but in India formal acceptance of this attitude may be made by many who in truth are far from being real Rationalists. No person is a real Rationalist whose whole active life is not consistent with his formal mental attitude, and it is because action and opinion are so often divorced from each other, even among leaders of Indian thought, that we lay stress on such consistency as the indispensable characteristic of true Rationalists.

In Hindu India thought has been free, and persecution for merely holding heterodox opinions has been rare. One of the systems of Indian philosophy is frankly atheistic, yet its promulgator is regarded with respect by the orthodox. Similarly, no ban was placed upon scientific speculation in ancient and medieval India, as there

was in Europe. India cannot produce a counterpart of the story of Galileo. Astronomers were allowed to teach in their Sanskrit books the true theory of eclipses, even while priests continued to offer prayers for the release of the sun or the moon from the demons Rahu and Ketu (whose attempts to swallow them up are popularly supposed to be the cause of eclipses), and beggars from the depressed classes continued to cry for alms as a sure means of effecting such release. But with all their scientific teaching these astronomers were expected to adhere to the ceremonial practices of offering prayers, observing a fast during the continuance of the eclipse, and finally, when it had ended, taking a bath to wash away the pollution it had caused.

What the people demand is a mechanical observance of the requisite ritual. When that is given, you can indulge in speculations to your heart's content. I myself was violently attacked in Indian papers because as the head of a college I refused to give the students a holiday to allow them to carry out these ceremonial purifications during an

eclipse, the real cause of which it was my duty to teach them in my classes. The outcry arose not because the editors of the papers did not intellectually accept the scientific explanation, but solely because I refused to conform in practice to current superstitions.

This want of conformity between conviction and practice is perhaps more common in India than elsewhere. In Europe, it is true, we find confirmed Rationalists taking part in what to them are meaningless mummeries, like baptism and communion ; but in India, where almost every action has acquired a religious flavour, the occasions for practising ceremonies in which one does not believe are infinite. In some instances a formal ceremony might have had some significance in ancient times, although at the present day all its significance has disappeared and only the empty shell remains. Nevertheless we still find intelligent and rational men continuing to conform, often at a great cost of time and money.

A typical example is afforded by the thread ceremony considered so essential by

Brahmins and some of the higher castes. In ancient days, when a boy was sent to stay with his teacher for twelve years, a formal ceremony of leave-taking by his parents was perhaps desirable. It was useful to impress on the mind of a boy of eight that study and obedience to his preceptor were his duties thenceforward, and that he was to practise *brahmacharya* (complete self-denial and continence) for twelve years. Nowadays, with schools available everywhere, the boy begins his schooling before his eighth year and does not usually go to live with his teacher at all. Generally he does not go in for ancient Vedic learning, but is expected to begin learning English—a *mleecha* or *yāvani* language which, according to an ancient Sanskrit saying, one should not speak even if the vital spark were to disappear from one's body. The parents might even have been thinking of getting the boy married or finally betrothed, although under the Sarda Act this is not now possible. Still the old ceremony is religiously performed by all Brahmins ; and castes like the Mahrathas are introducing it

among themselves in order to acquire the status of the twice-born. Any rare Rationalist who refuses to perform his son's thread ceremony on accōunt of his principles is considered more blameworthy than a man who, while conforming to all formal religious injunctions, leads an immoral or a dissolute life.

Not only is heterodoxy in opinion, if coupled with religious conformity in practice, condoned generally in Hindu India, but it often happens that society is prepared to wink at grave breaches of the moral law if they are not flaunted too openly before its eyes. Thus, although the use of alcohol is contrary to religion and is universally disapproved, persons generally known to indulge in it pass as respectable members of society provided they do not do so too publicly. A man may have one or more mistresses belonging to another caste, or even to another religion, without any social penalties, such as excommunication, being imposed upon him ; but woe to the man who puts his anti-caste principles into practice and marries a woman of another

caste. He is immediately excommunicated and loses all standing in society; nobody will eat or drink with him, and the offspring of this mixed marriage will find their life a misery.

An earnest social reformer who, contrary to the custom of his caste, married a widow was upbraided by some very devout and religious men, who asked why, if he wanted to live with her, he could not be content to keep her as his mistress? Why, they wondered, should he insist on marrying her? In their eyes immorality and laxity were venial faults, but an irreligious action was a mortal sin.

In putting one's convictions into actual practice it is indeed necessary to take many points into consideration. Some of these are acutely discussed by Morley in his book, "On Compromise," and we can hardly add to the cogency of its arguments. Suffice it to say that the presumption is all in favour of the duty of acting according to your conviction when such action has a direct effect on yourself alone. Strong reasons must then be adduced to justify any action

incompatible with your reasoned belief. When your action directly affects others you may have to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of two courses, but the fact that religion—or what passes for such in popular opinion—forbids a certain action should not be allowed to influence you.

While the duty of acting according to one's reasoned judgment is imperative on the Rationalist, he is equally required not to think ill of others because they do not agree with him. Free discussion with the object of persuading others to accept your view, and in the last resort agreement to differ, are enjoined upon the Rationalist. The only actions which he must disapprove are those which if generally followed will lead to the disruption of the social structure, bringing increased unhappiness to the people about you. But even this qualification should not be carried to extremes. The social structure with which you are acquainted may not be the last word on the subject. Changes in it are always possible, though to be effective and permanently

beneficial they must necessarily be gradual. The things that are taken for granted in your society may not be even thought of in others, and one must therefore be on guard against thinking that any action, even against the prevailing beliefs, will lead to revolutionary results.

There is a prominent school of thought in our country—indeed, there is a similar one in every country—which believes that this insistence on the duty to act according to conviction may be all very well for a few choice spirits, but that forms and ceremonies and irrational social laws and customs are necessary for the common people. It is even felt that they are an essential part of our nationality, and that with their disappearance our national integrity will be a thing of the past.

Men of this school of thought take an active part in meaningless ceremonies and festivals just to keep the ignorant in good humour.

We consider this to be an entirely vicious attitude. Nothing can make wrong an object desirable in itself, though when a

wrong already exists it may be a matter for mature consideration what immediate steps should be taken towards righting it. With all their religious pretensions, those who argue in this way seem by their attitude to have no strong hold on the fundamental principles of truth, right, and liberty. Only in so far as these principles animate the members of a society will that society continue to prosper and progress.

The Rationalist who puts his rationalism into actual practice may therefore rest assured that he is contributing more to real national progress by his actions than those who are content to follow the line of least resistance by conforming to the prevailing customs, however unreasonable, whether from mere mental inertia, or a love of applause, or a deliberately calculated policy of keeping the masses ignorant and tractable. The path of the Rationalist may be more difficult, but it is the only one consistent with his rational principles and his aspirations for the well-being of humanity.

SACRED BOOKS

UNLIKE Christians, Moslems, and Jews, the followers of Hinduism and allied faiths have no single book which is the fountain of their religion.

A vast mass of literature is regarded as sacred, though the authority of the different parts varies according to their character. The three well-recognised classes are Shruti, Smriti, and Purana. The first group consists of the Vedas, which are supposed to record what was actually heard by the various *rishis* from the supreme creator. Actually they form a collection of writings, all in very archaic Sanskrit, by a variety of authors. The text has been accurately preserved, for in ancient days a Brahmin had to learn the Vedas by heart, spending many years of his youth in doing so. Generally their meaning was not understood, and the process of learning came to be a mere mechanical recitation, whose very sound was regarded as peculiarly sacred.

During recent years the Vedas have been subjected to a close scholarly analysis, which has shown them to be a very important source of information about ancient Aryan civilisation. Though the Vedas are supposed to be the fundamental source of Hinduism, or at least Brahminism, the ancient *rishis*, if they could come to life now, would hardly recognise their present-day successors as lineal descendants of their own civilisation. Many customs and practices described in the Vedas have been given up or completely changed. Still, Hindus regard themselves as followers of the Vedas. If charged with inconsistency they have a ready saying in excuse: "Custom overrides the Shastras." Purely scholarly criticism of the Vedas does not, in fact, cause any great resentment on the part of the faithful, and pillars of orthodoxy have been known to sustain the theory that the Vedas were man-made and not supernatural.

The Smritis are the next in importance. They are very numerous, and were written by learned men who laid down laws about

"A native Society at Poona, which is generally called the Patriotic Society, entertains an objection to the Bengal system (of assessing grants at a certain proportion of the income guaranteed from private sources). This Society has lately started the Fergusson College, and attracted by an appeal to patriotism the very best outturn from our High Schools which the educated ranks of the Brahmin and other Hindu-society in Poona can afford. It believes that it will distance all rivals in the examination-room and it has no fear of the result system. It argues that the salaries paid to its teachers afford no index to their value. The College wishes to be largely independent of any European element in its lecture-rooms, and to impress upon its students the patriotic sentiments of its independent founders. The experiment has no parallel in any other city in India, and is interesting from other points of view than the educational aspect."

CHAPTER III

FORMATION OF THE DECCAN EDUCATION SOCIETY

It was essential for the success of the project of popular education unfolded by the managers of the New English School before the Education Commission that they should form themselves into a corporate body with a view to ensuring continuity of effort in that cause, and winning public confidence as to the stability and permanence of institutions they might establish. Then again, if the public was to be invited to contribute funds on a scale adequate to the undertaking, the administration of such funds would have to vest in the hands of an organized body, including men interested in education and possessing influence in Indian society. From the very outset the conductors regarded themselves not as proprietors but as temporary trustees, who on their own personal responsibility and by their own personal sacrifices, would place the school on a firm footing, and then convert it into a public institution, accepting for themselves the status of its lifelong servants. When the college-scheme began to take a definite shape the formation of a corporate body became a matter of urgent necessity.

The earliest mention of the idea of forming a Society occurs in the superintendent's report for the year 1883. It is said therein that in order to realize the higher object of establishing a private Arts College, and with the help of graduates and undergraduates trained therein, of covering the whole of Maharashtra with a network of private schools, it was desirable to constitute a "Board of Trustees with a Managing Committee attached to it." In these words the constitution of the contemplated Society was adumbrated. Throughout the early months of the year 1884 the constitution was being discussed with friends and slowly developed. When at last it was thought that the preliminary spadework was completed and time was ripe for formally launching the Society into existence, the superintendent of the New English School issued the following invitation to those interested in the cause of education:

ences unconnected with the main story may be found very valuable.

Among the common people these epics and Puranas form the intellectual background of Hinduism. There is, however, a good deal of uncritical acceptance of the literal truth of every story; imaginative details are often discussed as if they were real facts. Some of the Puranas are characterised by extreme grossness, and, like portions of the Bible, are unsuitable for youthful study. Some of the stories are obviously written with the object of praising a particular caste and libelling rival castes; consequently among some of the non-Brahmins there is a good deal of prejudice against certain Puranas.

Among the books regarded with special reverence among the Hindus are the Bhagwat Gita and the Upanishads, which are mainly discussions of philosophical questions. Many Hindus are in the habit of reading daily a chapter of the Gita as part of their sacred duties. It is impossible to discuss these works in detail here, and it is hoped that scholars will devote some atten-

tion to a discussion of them from the Rationalist standpoint. There is some difference of opinion as to whether the main teaching of the Gita advocates Karma or Bhakti—the ideal of work or that of devotion and faith. Politicians are often in the habit of quoting the Gita, and in fact scattered verses from it can be cited to sustain any view.

Besides these books in Sanskrit there are many writings in the vernaculars which are also read and recited in a reverential spirit. The *abhangas* of Tukaram are on the lips of many people in the Maharashtra. The lives of the various saints have a great influence on the people generally, but there is always a tendency, even among the educated, to accept uncritically every detail and to believe in the miraculous stories related of these holy men. There is no doubt that their moral teaching is on the whole admirable; but the stress they lay on passive acceptance of circumstance, on submission to fate, and dependence on the day-to-day intervention of their particular god, has increased the fatalistic tendency of the

Indian masses and made them less ready to strive for progress by their own endeavour. In particular, the constant harping by the saints on the transitoriness of the world is inconsistent with modern social ideas.

Discerning Rationalists should try to retain the good that is in these writings, and should examine them in an appreciative spirit. The point that we wish to impress is that there is too much regard for mere words and too little rational thought in dealing with all this literature.

The above brief account of the sacred books of the Hindus shows that the task of the Rationalist in India on the critical side is not so difficult as it is in Christian countries. His main duty is to encourage the critical spirit in action. Some Indian reformers are prone to put too great a stress on ancient sacred books in advocating their particular reforms. One often hears the cry "Back to the Vedas." Although this way of proceeding may perhaps facilitate some slight progress in certain matters, it must be remembered that holy texts can

be quoted in support of almost any view. On the whole the proper method is to depend upon the guidance of reason, and not to get involved in scholastic subtleties. It is the manner in which a reform is achieved that is often more important than the reform itself. Otherwise the change may mean merely the substitution of one kind of bondage for another.

A good part of this sacred literature is interesting and often very beautiful. It provides material essential for constructing the history of ancient India, as direct information on this subject is extremely rare. It enshrines the experience and ideas of numberless generations and the best thoughts of the great men of old. We have not a word to say against the proper use and enjoyment of this treasure house of the past. It is only against its unintelligent or superstitious use that we protest. The *Æneid* of Virgil is a thing of beauty which has contributed to the enjoyment of mankind. But that does not justify using Virgil, as was often done in medieval times, for making prophecies by opening the book at random

and reading the first line that strikes the eye. A similar attitude towards this sacred Hindu literature is cramping the thought of India. A rationalist and non-religious way of regarding it will do far more to instil the spirit of independence and enterprise than any movement to go back completely to even the most brilliant periods depicted in any of these works.

It is further a matter for consideration whether a good part of the advantages of such literature cannot be derived by each community carefully studying the literatures regarded as sacred by the other communities. In this way the sense of beauty can be satisfied without the faculty of reason being distorted by the mental attitude which one brings to bear on books considered sacred by one's own people.

OMENS AND PROPHECIES

THE non-Rationalist frame of mind produced by religious faiths makes believers in religion an easy prey to any person professing to pry into the future.

The curiosity of man is insatiable. He desires to know something of his future, hoping perhaps that a fortunate change in his position may compensate for his present unhappiness.

Priests and ministers of religion have always claimed to be able to foretell the future. The augurs who examined the entrails of the sacrificed animals or watched the flights of birds ; the ceremonial reading of the Sibylline books at important national crises ; the story of Cassandra — these illustrate the intense curiosity about the future displayed by the Greeks and the Romans. Witches, crystal-gazers, palmists, and astrologers are other supposed prophets who wield considerable influence over the

ignorant in spite of the legal risks they run in the exercise of their calling. In India such classes do a roaring business not only among the ignorant but even among educated people. Priests cast horoscopes and also pretend to ward off impending evil by a repetition of sacred *mantras.*

Favourable and unfavourable omens are deduced from the most trifling incidents. A cat crossing your path from left to right means one thing, and if it crosses from right to left it means the exact opposite. If you see a widow when you start on some business it is a bad omen ; but if you see a married woman, especially carrying a pot of water on her head, it is a particularly good omen. Particular days of the week or month are supposed to be lucky ; others unlucky.

The number of such beliefs is infinite. They all exercise influence, often unconscious, on the mind, and frequently cause pain or fear. Especially when such beliefs are impressed on the young, it is very difficult to free the mind from their unconscious effects.*

* Owing to my having been born with foot presentation, which is supposed to render a person

The most common and the most important of such attempts to foretell the future is the supposed science of astrology. There are a great number of people, even of good education, in Western countries who believe in it. Books are published at the beginning of every year claiming to reveal what important events will take place, what persons will die, or what the weather is going to be. In spite of the practice of astrology for gain being illegal in England, there are still a large number of these practitioners. Many famous novels, including Scott's "Guy Mannering" and "Quentin Durward," turn upon a successful prophecy. It is impossible to see how it came to be believed that the planets have an influence upon the details of a man's life. But certain it is that astrology is practised in all countries, and

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unusually liable to be killed by lightning, I was taught in early childhood to be specially careful about thunderstorms. Even now I wince when I see a flash. As a set-off to this liability, I am supposed to be gifted with the power of curing lumbago with the touch of my left foot. This belief about the power to cure lumbago is common among several communities, as Sir James Frazer informed me.

that it is believed in by many otherwise rational persons.

No Rationalist will, of course, absolutely deny the possibility of the truth of anything that can be fairly conceived. Several apparently absurd theories have been proved to be more or less true when *a priori* they would have been rejected off-hand. Thus a correlation between sunspots and the variations of the monsoons has been made more than probable by scientific investigation. The germs of a certain disease are found in the blood only if it is examined at night, but any effect of daylight upon blood (which is not directly exposed to it) seems opposed to common sense. Still, all these apparent absurdities must be regarded as such until they are explained by strict scientific reasoning.

If astrology is to be proved to have some basis of fact, the connection must be scientifically demonstrated. First of all you must have exact data, not inaccurate or vague statements which may mean anything. Such vagueness is dearly loved by astrologers, whose predictions are couched

in terms capable of many interpretations. Then exact data of definite predictions must be collected and subjected to statistical analysis, to find out whether the number of coincidences is greater than the laws of probability would lead one to expect. Again—though this is not absolutely necessary—one must have some working theory of the mechanism by which the planets exercise influence on human affairs. Further, certain objections must be overcome. Thus, taking the population of the whole world, it is obvious that on an average some twenty or thirty persons are being born every second, and these must be under approximately similar astrological conditions, and consequently must have similar conditions in their lives—a thing which is not observed. Again, new discoveries are being continually made, and even new ways of meeting death have become common. The periodic nature of planetary motions cannot possibly account for entirely new conditions in the world of human affairs.

These and other considerations must strike a rational mind, which will require

very strong proofs before it accepts this so-called science of astrology as worthy of credence. The fact that belief in it is so widespread is but another proof of the fact that the reign of reason can hardly be said to have begun for the generality of mankind.

While the truth of astrology is, to put it at the lowest, very problematical, the belief in it gives rise to actual hardship and suffering. Men will spend any amount of money in paying priests to recite *mantras* or to perform various ceremonies to propitiate unfavourable planets. As if, indeed—assuming astrology to be true—such incantations can influence the motions and positions of celestial bodies millions of miles away!

Many people will refuse to undertake a really necessary task because the time is not auspicious according to the astrologer. Girls or boys, in all practical respects desirable, have great difficulty in getting married if they are born under some particular position of Mars. Newspapers contain advertisements for suitable partners in such cases, for it is believed that either the husband or wife or father-in-law or mother-

in-law is sure to die soon if the correct partners are not secured. Many a girl after being married is held responsible for a sudden death in her husband's family; she is regarded as unlucky and is therefore badly treated. Racing men in cities like Bombay or Calcutta will consult an astrologer before making bets; even repeated losses after strictly following his directions are not enough to shake their belief in this pseudo-science. Speculators on the Stock Exchange often employ a consulting astrologer, and are occasionally lured to their ruin when common sense would have saved them.

To a Rationalist all scientific truth is sacrosanct, and he will not believe in a proven error even if it were declared to be useful. On the other hand, as astrology is at best not proven, it is pertinent to ask if an exact knowledge of the future is likely to lead to increased human happiness. The zest of life lies in its uncertainty, in the possibility that a man can influence his future, to some extent at least, by his own will and conscious conduct. If with the help of a horoscope everything relating to you in

the future is once for all determinable, you are likely to be careless of your own conduct and to cease to exert yourself and pull your weight in the race of human life.

Such belief is clearly antagonistic to faith in a living God who actively governs the world. But we find devout believers in religion who at one and the same time offer prayers for attaining their objects and also display a firm faith in astrology.

Inconsistency of this glaring description should be impossible if men used their reason correctly. The rational faculty, however, is not a strong point with orthodox believers.

We have spoken in detail of astrology because it has a certain air of science and has an enormous number of adherents not only in India but elsewhere. The same remarks apply to similar pseudo-sciences —palmistry, for example, which also has a great vogue everywhere.

To a Rationalist there is no short cut to a knowledge of the future. We can only form a rough guess about it, and the more facts we have before us and the more logical

use we make of them in drawing conclusions the more correct we are likely to be. But with the limited faculties of the human mind man will never be able to foretell the future accurately, and there will always remain an element of chance or luck in human affairs. With a better use of reason and with a greater exertion of energy this element may be greatly reduced, but the Rationalist will never pretend to know when he does not, and will calmly resign himself to this residuum of chance or luck if he has the firm consciousness that he has done his best, since no man can do more.

EDUCATION

THE Rationalist attitude is one of looking forward and not backward. Existing ideas and beliefs that do not stand the test of reason must be discarded in order that humanity may progress as rapidly as possible. Human inertia will, however, prove a very great obstacle to the attainment of the complete reign of reason. Men with their mental habits definitely formed will find it difficult to adopt new ways of thought, and even if they do formally adopt them they will still be subconsciously affected by the ideas with which they have grown up. For the effective conquest of irrationalism, therefore, prevention is far better than cure. Consequently proper education is a matter of vital importance to the Rationalist.

With a well-thought-out system of education, irrational ideas will not be allowed to sink into the mind of the growing child, who will thus grow up unhampered by the dead

weight of ignorance, intolerance, and superstition which are such great handicaps.

All religions and creeds have recognised the importance of influencing the education of the young, and in every country religious denominations do their best to consolidate their positions in the educational sphere. In England every measure of educational reform has to stand the racket of denominational disputes, and the institution of any new development is opposed by the partisans of various sectarian interests. Even such an obviously desirable measure of educational advance as the raising of the compulsory school age (which was recommended in the Hadow Report) was first torpedoed and finally destroyed mainly because the various sectarian interests of the Catholics, Churchmen, and Nonconformists could not be suitably bribed to agree upon a reasonable scheme. They oppose a universal and efficient system of education because they want to bolster up, at the cost of the State, their own sectarian schools, which are often inefficient, and which they are unable to improve so as to

accommodate children up to the age of fifteen. This is not the first occasion on which such wretched sectional squabbles have come in the way of the progress of the country.

To a Rationalist the sole aim of education is to develop all the innate faculties of the growing child, chief among which is the power of reasoning, which most differentiates us from the brute creation. Every proposal of an educational character should be judged by this single test. Every measure which is calculated to hinder this development should be strenuously opposed.

In many countries, however, not confined to the East, the aim of education is often consciously, though sometimes unconsciously, inconsistent with the pure good of the child. In a country like Italy the goal may be the implanting of Fascist ideas in the susceptible mind of the child and the consolidation of the Fascist régime. In Russia it may be the propagation of Bolshevism and the unquestioned acceptance of the dogma of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other countries it may be the

creation of large masses of people who will cheerfully serve as the necessary cannon fodder for achieving nationalist aims. In others, again, it may be not the development of reason, but its suppression, so that the child may grow up to accept without question the supremacy of a powerful theocracy. But to our mind any system of education with a definite propagandist bias is tainted. The best, nay the only, system is that which trusts to the natural evolution of the mind and gives to the growing child the fullest possible scope for free development.

With the vast number of conflicting sects and religions in India the question of religious education becomes of the utmost complexity. Before the present system of school education came into being some seventy-five years ago, the education of the average village child, among those classes that cared about such matters at all, consisted only of a firm grounding in the three R's. All other subjects forming the present curriculum were entirely left out. Some boys went through a pretty long course of ancient

learning, which, among the highest class of Hindus, consisted mainly of memorising many Sanskrit works. Those who were destined to be priests had to learn the various sacred books by heart without understanding their meaning—a task which was supposed to take at least twelve years. Those who wanted to qualify as physicians had to study various old sanskrit works on medicine, and also to serve as apprentices to practising physicians to learn the technique of the profession, though the absence of a regular system of professional qualifications gave rise to innumerable quacks. Others who wanted to be shastris and pandits studied under some teacher the various epics, Puranas, and philosophical works; most of their study, however, was conducted in the Sanskrit language.

There was no great differentiation of the learned professions, for a learned shastri was generally supposed to be equally able to cast a horoscope, to determine the auspicious days of the calendar, to officiate at ceremonies, to preach a sermon, to give an opinion on disputed questions of religious

or social custom, and even sometimes to prescribe for illness or to read the hand. Of course, such all-round excellence was rare, but the common people considered that a learned man knew everything.

The average villager among the higher classes merely learned, besides his three R's, how to say his prayers, and his reading in after life did not go beyond a regular perusal of a chapter or two of the vernacular renderings of some of the puranas.

The whole upbringing of men was characterised by a devout performance of various religious ceremonies. It was only within their own limited fields that they showed shrewd common sense; in other matters they often accepted without question fantastic statements and superstitious ideas. Generally speaking, their critical powers were quite untrained. Ignorance of the world outside their personal experience was complete, for only a few went beyond their immediate vicinity, and then only on an occasional pilgrimage. Prescription and custom reigned supreme, and anything new

was condemned simply on account of its novelty.

In the case of the lower castes, and of women generally, knowledge of even the three R's was absent. They were able to get only such ideas and knowledge as were current among their fellows. They heard preachers read the Puranas, knew the stories from the old epics as told by their elders, learned to recite many portions of devotional poetry, and of course knew the appropriate words to be said in the innumerable religious ceremonies that formed a great part of their daily life. No avenue was open for the conscious widening of the mental horizon. Opinions and ideas were merely derived from people round about, and they offered a very favourable soil for the growth of superstitious practices and crude ideas. Public opinion, however, exerted a steadying influence on conduct, and ideals—especially in matters of sex—were very rigid.

In the bigger towns there was a more active existence, but even there no regular education of the modern kind was attempted.

Some of the leaders picked up a few new ideas from foreigners whom they met, or from parts of the country they had to visit in the course of their duties. But the developments in knowledge of various kinds going on outside India were almost unknown. Foreign travel was banned by religious injunction among the Hindus, and European languages were unknown. Hindus studied Persian and Arabic when they were the languages of their Muslim rulers, but no contact with the currents of Western thought was obtained thereby. Even as regards military science, which the innumerable wars made so necessary, the manufacture of arms and ammunition was not well known among them, and modern weapons were procured from European traders. Religious distinctions as regards caste, etc., were strictly observed, and their strict maintenance formed one of the principal preoccupations of the decadent Indian rulers.

Such was the state of education and intellectual culture at the beginning of the British rule. The golden age of Hindu culture had ended some eight centuries

before, and in the chaos consequent upon the invasions of the Moslems no new developments had arisen in any direction except sometimes in the form of religious movements. When the British power was gradually consolidated a knowledge of English became a very valuable acquisition to the Indians, assisting them in gaining positions of power and prestige under the administration. The higher classes of Hindus began thus gradually to study English in schools started in various places by the Government, and especially by the missionaries. The Moslems did not at first take kindly to English education. Their resultant backwardness still persists to some extent, and is one of the main causes of the Hindu-Moslem tension so pronounced in these days.

About a hundred years ago the Government deliberately adopted the policy of spreading Western education. The main object was to provide the large numbers of Indians required to hold subordinate posts in the administration, though some of the original advocates of this system had also wider views about introducing the Indian

people to Western civilisation by means of English literature, history, and science. The Christian missionaries, who were allowed to begin their operations in India about the same time, had a purely propagandist object in view. By educating Indians in English they wanted to convert them to Christianity. In the earlier days they achieved some success, and the five or six million Christians existing in India at the present day are a measure of their achievement. It must be remembered, however, that all these conversions cannot be strictly credited to educational activities, since vast numbers of converts were secured from the lowest classes of Indians during times of famine.

In Government schools a policy of strict neutrality in matters of religion has been followed. A foreign Government naturally does not wish to complicate its task by laying itself open to charges of religious favouritism. The missionary schools, on the other hand, generally made religious teaching compulsory—as regards, of course, the Christian religion, not the religion of the pupils. Hindu and Moslem and Parsi boys

studying in these schools were obliged to attend the Bible classes, although the religious atmosphere in their homes was non-Christian.

There is no doubt that such teaching gradually relaxed the hold of the Indian religions on the pupils, though not many took the further step of conversion to Christianity. As education advanced the missionary schools formed a smaller and smaller percentage of the total number of educational institutions in the country, and Indians themselves began to take a larger share in founding schools and colleges. All over the country private and grant-in-aid schools and colleges now represent the largest proportion of the secondary and higher educational institutions. Government and other publicly managed institutions come next, and missionary institutions form the smallest section. Till recent times these private institutions were all on a purely secular basis, just like Government institutions ; and the question of religious education was hardly ever raised.

The growth of secondary and higher

education roused the national political aspirations of the people. At the same time the older people came to see that the educated classes no longer accepted without question all the current religious beliefs and practices, and as these beliefs and practices are intimately connected with the moral standards of the people, complaints arose from many quarters against the so-called "godless" education given in schools and colleges which was alleged to be sapping the character and debasing the moral fibre of the youth of the country.

The nationalist movement led to exaggerated praise—at least in words—of everything old and the condemnation of everything new. The missionary attacks on Hinduism also evoked a reaction in favour of the old religions; and beliefs that could not well be defended in their popular form were often given some esoteric meaning, buttressed by modern scientific and philosophical conceptions.

A cry thus arose in favour of religious and national education in the schools and colleges. The Arya Swaraj started its

Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College at Lahore; Mrs. Besant and the theosophists the Central Hindu College, which later on developed into the Benares Hindu University; and the Muslims the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College, which later became the Aligarh University. National educational institutions were also started as a part of the new political movement. Less known schools and other private institutions were opened in other parts of India. The main objective, however, was the existing system of educational institutions, in which, it was contended, religious instruction should be introduced.

A demand also arose for the introduction of a conscience clause, directed particularly against missionary institutions, which are almost wholly attended by non-Christian pupils. The missionary bodies at first opposed this movement, but they have been compelled to give way, at least in those places where the missionary institution is the only school available.

When education became a transferred subject under the Montagu–Chelmsford

Reforms the subject of religious education was sometimes raised in the new councils. In some places facilities of an optional nature are given for the imparting of religious education in public educational institutions by private bodies under proper regulations. These facilities do not, however, appear to have been much used, and the main demand is for a wholesale change to regular religious teaching by the authorities themselves, subject perhaps to a conscience clause.

If one looks a little deeper into this question of religious education, going beyond vague nationalist aspirations, one is confronted with immense difficulties. In the first place, what is meant by religious education? Is it possible to give it to pupils in educational institutions; and, if so, at what stage is it to begin? The so-called "philosophy of religion" is admittedly unsuitable to pupils below the age of eighteen or so, and all that can be done before that stage is the inculcation of some formal doctrines, which, moreover, the child is unable to understand fully. It is of course possible to

make a child learn mechanically some prayers or the words of some holy book like the Vedas or the Gita ; but if one refuses to admit any extraordinary merit in the mere sound of these good words, it is not easy to see what use this exercise of memory can be in developing the dormant faculties of the child.

Again, one can tell the children stories from holy books like the Puranas or the Epics, just as, in the West, Bible stories are taught. These stories are often a great storehouse of imaginative literature, but sometimes they are the reverse of elevating. In any case, the element of supernatural interest generally associated with them often warps the rational faculty of the child. When God or some other superhuman being acts the main part in a narrative, its use as a guide to ordinary human conduct becomes negligible. The main thing that a growing child should be taught to understand is the intimate relation between cause and effect in ordinary human affairs. But if prayers or religious ceremonies can, as is alleged in the stories, change the regular order of nature or

save some one from the consequences of his own actions, then these stories do not serve any educational purpose.

If it were distinctly impressed upon the child that the tales are merely efforts of the imagination, then no harm could arise from them. But the solemn way in which these legends are recounted, the insistence upon their complete truth, and the discouragement of any questions about them, are all directly opposed to correct educational method.

If a knowledge of religious beliefs be considered necessary at all for purposes of emotional culture, it is worth considering whether the child would not derive greater benefit by being made acquainted with the beliefs of people other than those with whom it is brought up. But the best plan is to learn of these matters when one is old enough to think rationally about them, and can thus derive benefit without harm to the whole mental and moral structure.

The supposed connection between religion and morality has been discussed in a previous chapter. Religious teaching is,

however, particularly defended as a part of moral education, sometimes even by those who themselves do not accept the truth of the religion. We consider it quite possible to impart moral education on a rational basis by appealing to such experience as the child is constantly getting, to simple historical narratives, to accounts of people in other parts of the world, or to the natural instincts of the child, its love of approbation, its sense of justice and fair play, or its affection for its parents. Indeed, the best kind of moral education that can be given is indirect—through the influence of the teacher and the respect that his character inspires, the general tone of the school (both in the classroom and the playground), the way in which the several subjects are taught, and the books that the child is encouraged to read out of school hours. All these things have a far greater effect on the moral character of the child than any formal teaching of religion, or even of morals. On the other hand, if the teacher who gives this formal teaching is one who does not command the respect and affection of his pupils,

his teaching is likely to have an effect contrary to the one desired.

The growing child is intensely curious, and is continually asking its elders all sorts of questions. These questions are not always easy to answer; they often call for inexhaustible reserves of knowledge, patience and sympathy, which the average parent or teacher does not possess. The usual means of shaking off such inconvenient questions is to impress upon the child an exaggerated view of the importance of obedience, and of unquestioned acceptance of any answer, however meagre or unsatisfying. After some experience of such cavalier treatment the child ceases to ask questions and tries to form its own ideas, which are often necessarily crude. This is most observed in regard to matters of sex, as the child is generally taught to regard questions about them as impertinent and wicked. But the harm done by such treatment is permanent, and it is gratifying to note that the proper education of the growing child in the phenomena of sex is now being recognised by educationists as a matter of

supreme importance, though the average parent has not yet reached the same stage of enlightenment.

The same repression of healthy curiosity is taking place in matters of religion. Children are taught to do mechanically many things whose real meaning they fail to understand. Take the case of prayers. Even if these are in the mother tongue of the child—and they are not always so either in India or elsewhere—the phrases are usually too difficult, and the child often attaches fanciful meanings to the strange words it is taught to utter. Many of us can call to mind comic instances of such mistakes, drawn from our own experience. When the prayers are in a dead language which neither the child nor the parent nor the teacher can well understand, such mistakes are far more common.

Mere similarity of sound causes absurd meanings to be attached to the words, and even professional priests have been known to recite Sanskrit hymns on occasions to which they could not possibly be related. Sometimes, from a certain resemblance of

the sound of the ancient words to the sound of some common obscene vernacular words, an effect the very reverse of edifying is produced on the mind of the child.

In spite of all the fine talk about the effect of religion on the emotional nature of man, religion generally means, even to the average grown-up man or woman, the strict observance of certain practices of social custom or etiquette. To the child, therefore, religious conduct means only conformity to these practices. No distinction is made between the essential and the non-essential in conduct; often, indeed, many non-essential or even positively harmful social conventions are regarded as more important than correct moral conduct.

In England at an evening party a man would be far more ashamed of wearing a black tie with a white dress-waistcoat than if he became somewhat intoxicated. Till recently in an Indian village a Hindu who refused to shave off his moustache on the death of his father would have been an almost unthinkable enormity, far more reprehensible than another who had con-

tinually quarrelled with his father and made his life a misery. The child growing up in an environment of this kind will naturally come to imbibe similar ideas, and it should be the aim of education to encourage a more sensible and truly moral outlook. The advocates of religious education will, if successful, only hamper the already slow emancipation of the Indian mind from old and out-of-date superstitious ideas.

The characteristic claim of all religions is that they alone embody the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This claim has always encouraged a spirit of intolerance about other religions, and it is only in comparatively modern times that a few of the highest minds have come to appreciate the need of tolerance in religion. But if intolerance is the usual characteristic of the human race in its infancy, when religion is regarded as the most vital matter, similar intolerance will be bred in the child by insistence upon religion in its earlier education. It will come to think ill of others who are not religious in its own exact sense of conforming to the current social code.

In India the effect is bound to be specially disastrous, as the child comes into intimate contact mostly with people of its own caste, and is but too likely to acquire caste prejudices. If these prejudices are further to be impressed upon it as the essential part of religious conduct, they will be only the more deeply confirmed.

It is, of course, true that the full effect of formal teaching is never realised in practical life. The child as it grows up comes to learn that there are other people who, without sharing all the so-called religious truths it is taught to believe, are still decent men and women. But the unconscious effect remains, and to that extent religious education is an obstacle to a broad humanitarian outlook.

If a high-caste Hindu child is taught in its early days to regard the touch of a *mahar* (one of the depressed classes) as making it impure in the religious sense and requiring a bath to wipe out the pollution, it will require some mental effort in its later life to learn to regard a *mahar* as a human being like itself. Even if it is able to do so

intellectually, it will probably continue to be unconsciously influenced by the early impression. The treatment of these depressed classes is perhaps the heaviest count against Hindu religion, and religious education will make the abolition of untouchability more difficult than it need be.

It is true that the Hindu religion cannot, like Islam or Christianity, be charged with any systematic persecution of other religions. The Bhagwat-Gita tells us that death in one's own religion is desirable, while in another's it is to be feared. Hinduism has therefore not been, so far, a proselytising religion, and it has generally been noted for a kind of tolerance. But this tolerance is not of the active kind that seeks to be friendly with others; it is rather of a passive sort, which keeps aloof from others, content to live and let live. Generally this tolerance is coupled with a consciousness of superiority in being a born Hindu as the result of some merit in a past existence. Consequently there is a tendency to look down upon strangers. What is wanted in these days is the growth of a broad humani-

tarian and nationalist spirit, which transcends all bounds of caste or religion, and takes everybody for what he intrinsically is, apart from accidental differences of ways and manners. It is because we are convinced that religious education is calculated to hamper the growth of this wider humanism and nationalism that we are firmly opposed to introducing it in an educational system which has hitherto been generally free from it and has been the mainspring of the present national awakening in India.

We have already mentioned that several sectarian institutions started in India during the last thirty or forty years aim at preserving a peculiarly religious atmosphere. It is, however, difficult to see any difference between the products of those institutions and of other ordinary institutions giving only the usual secular kind of instruction. The compulsory observance of religious practices is generally regarded by the pupils as a kind of infliction, and occasionally as fun. The visitor, on being taken round such an institution, does not observe anything solemn about it. He may be shown the

prayer hall, but the faces of the pupils taking part in the prayers do not suggest anything of a specially serious character.

The proceedings are somewhat similar to "keeping chapels" in the older universities in England. This routine religious observance has been found, on experience, to be of no great educational value; consequently compulsory chapels have been given up in many of the colleges. We expect that the same will happen among the sectarian institutions in India at no distant date.

Under any conditions, however, the segregation of the young followers of a particular religion or sect in one particular institution naturally tends to breed among them an intense sectarian spirit. The pupils do not come into contact with others professing a different religion, and the indirect object of a liberal education in fostering a wider outlook is therefore frustrated. Even games played by pupils of such institutions assume occasionally a sectarian colour; cricket and other matches between two schools may become very serious events, with a racial or sectarian significance.

The most urgent need of India at the present moment is a better understanding between the followers of different religions. In order to attain this it is necessary to provide as many opportunities as possible for friendly association. What more effective means for this purpose can there be than education under a common roof and under the guidance of the same teachers, coupled with association on the playground and in various college societies ? Everyone knows that school and college friendships are the most enduring and the most disinterested of all. But the Indian sectarian institutions are unfortunately reducing the all-too-rare opportunities for the formation of such friendships among the younger members of different communities in India.

While we thus strongly insist on the need of education being secular, we consider that the curriculum of studies must contain subjects which will develop all the faculties of the pupils. In particular we think that science in its wider aspects should take a leading part in the curriculum, with a view to developing the logical faculty of the pupil

and making him realise the reign of law and order throughout the world of nature. A study of science—including the biological sciences and sociology—will render the pupils less prone to accept superstitious beliefs which were held in ancient times only because of ignorance of the laws of nature. They will learn that no authority, however eminent, should prevail against the lessons of experience. They will perceive that the world is, on the whole, making progress, and that the accounts of a past golden age are mostly figments of the imagination. Above all, they will realise that, just as their intellectual and moral structure is the result of the work of those who have gone before, their own work will contribute, in however minute a way, to the structure of the future generations of men.

An education that firmly impresses on the mind our duty to humanity is infinitely better than one which, even according to its most extravagant claims, merely teaches us how to attain our own personal salvation.

CONCLUSION

IT should be unnecessary to emphasise that the object in penning the preceding pages is to point out to my countrymen and to others some of the main obstacles in the path of Indian progress. As the well-known saying has it, man is man's greatest enemy, and it is only by seeing his own deficiencies that man can be led to become his own greatest friend.

The writer yields to none in his love for his country; but that love is not inconsistent with seeing and declaring what is wrong in its social and intellectual structure. There is a kind of nationalism which deems it essential to hide every element of evil behind a carefully preserved appearance of perfection. The evil, however, if neglected, will not disappear; it will tend to grow worse and worse. It is no use dealing with symptoms merely; one must boldly face the root of the trouble. That trouble,

according to the writer, consists essentially in the intellectual outlook which gives an exaggerated importance to authority, considers independence of judgment and action as something anti-social, and leads one to think that the first duty of man is the life hereafter and not the life in this actual and living world.

When we are talking of progress in the political field or the economic sphere, it must not be forgotten that no advance can be achieved if one's intellectual being is permeated by servility and dependence. The realisation of our highest ideals will be brought nearer if more and more citizens are allowed the free use of their reason, unfettered by dogmas, prescription, or the fiats of priests or ministers of religion, and are encouraged to follow the dictates of their rational faculty in action. After all, true national well-being consists in getting the best out of every single individual, in order to build up a better and greater whole. And this best can be extracted only if each citizen has a feeling of complete freedom, limited only by a sincere regard for the

similar freedom of others. In India we talk of a want of freedom in the political and economic fields, but there is an equal, if not greater, want of freedom in the social, intellectual, and moral fields for which we cannot blame any foreigners, but are ourselves alone responsible. Once assure everybody of this freedom, and the other kind of freedom will not be long in coming.

We talk of restrictions put upon us by law or governmental action, and complain of race discrimination or economic exploitation. There is a great deal of force in these complaints, but what about the senseless restrictions that society puts upon its members? What about the race discrimination that is the essence of the caste system? What about the economic disabilities caused by restricting men to their ancestral professions? We agitate in the legislatures for the removal of the racial bar in the services, but do we feel equally sympathetic to the demand of the depressed classes to be allowed to draw water from the village wells, to enter temples or use other public

conveniences? We inveigh against the reservation of certain railway compartments for Anglo-Indians and Europeans, but do our Brahmin countrymen in Southern India feel equally keen against the reservation of certain village streets to Brahmins only? It is true that two wrongs do not make one right, but strong words in one connection lose a great deal of force if they are not used equally strongly in other connections.

A true Rationalist must realise the absolute necessity of thorough correspondence between opinion and action in all spheres. He will not allow his intellectual and moral world to be divided into water-tight compartments. He will not be content to have his philosophical, social, or even religious opinions at variance with his political opinions. For him, what holds in one case should hold also in the other.

Many persons—not in India alone—while holding thoroughly Rationalist views, often conceal them and lead their fellows to think that they share the prevailing opinions on religious matters. We have

already spoken of those concealed Rationalists who act from an honest belief that religion is necessary for social stability. But there are others who conceal their opinions merely from moral cowardice, who do not like to be dubbed atheists, and regard this term as a mere abusive epithet. We do not think that any Rationalist ever affirms that there is no God, if only for the reason that it is almost impossible to prove a negative. Moreover, the word "God" has as many meanings as there are different religious sects. But if atheism means simply being without belief in a God who controls the day-to-day affairs of this world, and who by prayers can be brought to change the invariable order of nature to suit one particular individual or a group of individuals, then every Rationalist is an atheist, and need not be ashamed of the title. He is in fact a more valuable member of society than many an orthodox believer, inasmuch as he does not look for the reward of his work in any prospective bliss in the life hereafter, but in the development of a better, healthier, and happier humanity. And what

reward can be greater than satisfaction in work well done, and in the consciousness that one has added his humble effort to carry the human race forward to greater intellectual and moral triumphs ?