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GAUMEYNDRANATH

TAGORE

THE TREACHEROUS MARSH

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To  
*SHRIMATI*

3rd September, 1948

## THE INTELLECTUAL

THEY look so wizened up and frail. How assiduously they cultivate this fragile look, the unflinching trade mark of intellectualism! They have read tons of books and have solved all the problems of life. They are the intellectuals of our epoch. Politics? Why of course, they know every bit of it, from Aristotle to Attlee, from utopian socialism to Stalinism, they know every thing. They have read all that is worth reading on this subject. In the cosy corner of the drawing-room, fortified with cigarettes and coffee, and inspired by a couple of rouged sweet sixteens or late thirties, they become political. The frozen political thoughts thaw in their minds and the width and depth of their political convictions make the fragile listeners simply gasp for breath.

But ask them to step out of the drawing-room into the dusty road, into the factories and fields where political theories receive their final test and supreme recognition, and at once their wisdom will vanish like the rainbow and they will resemble an inert mass of dead matter gone rotten through and through.

Anti-imperialism? Of course they are ardent supporters of anti-imperialism. In the mellow atmosphere of the drawing-room and in the presence of Juliets, their heroism knows no limit. Their holy wrath against the Churchills, Amerys and Linlithgows reaches white heat, and they work themselves up to an anti-imperialist frenzy, solely for the benefit of the admiring damsels—and themselves.

But just ask them to line up with the students and the workers in the streets, for challenging the lawless laws of

the imperialists, to defy the imperialist ukases which are derogatory to human dignity, to vindicate civil liberties by courting imprisonment and to join the masses in their fight against the imperialist oppressors, and just see the fun. Immediately the heroics die on their pale lips, their anti-imperialist wrath cools down to a freezing point and they look like so many poodles with unhappy haunted looks. They are the human jelly-fishes who melt into a dirty mess with the slightest touch of the sun of reality.

Social problems? Is there any social problem under the sun which they do not know! Ask them about the history of the origin of the caste system, about the cause of communalism, and they will blind you with the flashes of their intellectual lightning and the drawing-room will be aglow with the iridescence of these intellectual glow-worms.

But ask them to co-operate with you in your work for the abolition of the caste system and for strengthening of communal harmony amongst the Hindu and Muslim masses, and you will see how their spiritual faces turn grey like the craters of the burnt-out volcanoes.

These are the intellectuals of our time. They are the all-knowing supermen of the salons. Politics and philosophy, aesthetics and anthropology, imperialism and communism—all find their eternal rest in their brains. Their minds are stuffed like the dustbins with the garbage of sterile ideas.

Thoughts to them are mere abstractions, meant for creating impressions on gullible persons, but never to be translated into actions. Thoughts for them entail no responsibility, it is just a pose assumed to further personal ends.

This is the inner physiognomy of the intellectuals of this transitional epoch. They swarm like locusts on the

green and fertile field of human society, only to gorge themselves with the golden harvest of culture which they do not have the virility to absorb.

They only pollute and destroy with their insincerity the harvest of human culture.

Like water-hyacinths they are obstructing the flow of virile human thoughts into the creative channels of human action, and are perpetrating the greatest crime against humanity by their dishonest effort to delude people with the idea that thought is an end in itself.

The mushroom growth of these intellectuals is one of the surest indications of the decadence of the present bourgeois social order.

## THE HUCKSTER

THEY are the detached ones who have reached the summit of impersonality. They are attached to nothing, that is to say, to nothing that requires courage, sacrifice and vision in order to be translated into reality. They are attached only to abstraction, to pure idea, to transcendental thought and to the metaphysical absolute. They flourish in fairly large numbers in the present society. They are the hucksters of moral sympathy. They owe allegiance only to the absolute and to nothing else. It does not mean of course, that they do not feel for other things. Of course they do. They are so sensitive and cultured, how can they help not feeling for those who suffer from oppression, hunger and exploitation! For all those they have moral sympathy. These resplendent materialised souls exude gallons and gallons of the sweat of moral sympathy from every pore of their etherialised body.

When people are hungry and famished, these great souls boil with moral indignation. But they promptly wash off their souls their feelings for oppressed and exploited humanity with the holy water of moral sympathy and then heartily partake of a frugal dinner of six courses.

When the capitalist crooks sack workers after reaping all the profit they possibly can by wringing all the vitality out of the workers, then these sublime individuals of moral sympathy fame simply flare up like angry flames. It seems as if they will set fire to the entire world. But the next moment they will melt in tears of happiness and praise for the liberalism and tolerance of those crooks if only these capitalists are clever enough to pat them on the back.

Every oppression rouses their opposition—but only in the drawing-room and their opposition expresses itself as moral indignation against the oppressor and moral sympathy for the oppressed.

This is the high water-mark that this tidal wave of moral sympathy can reach. It reaches just up to the point where the ideas wait to be transformed into action. Moral sympathy halts and recoils before action.

Moral sympathy is neither moral nor sympathy. It is just sheer cowardice. It is the acknowledgement of one's inability to face reality and to work for its transformation. It is just a loophole through which the coward escapes with all his feathers of imaginary heroism untarnished.

If sympathy has to have any meaning, if it has to be moral and real, it must actively participate in the fulfilment of the ideal it sympathises with. Otherwise it is just a sham, a pose of the drawing-room and an utter falsehood.

In this period of bourgeois decadence when the storm of revolution is gathering, the degenerate bourgeois will throw up lots of moral sympathisers for the proletarian cause. Their mission is to soften down the anger and hatred of the oppressed masses against the oppressors; and their contribution, so far as the social transformation is concerned, is just as great as that of the toad-stool towards the fertility of the soil.

## THE SCEPTIC

THEY are our proud sceptics. The only thing they are sure of is that they are not sure of anything. They are the proud nihilists of our age. To them the acceptance of each and every value of life is qualified by 'but'. Doubt, uncertainty and distrust are the breath of their lives. How can they accept any value as finality when every thing is relative and changeable! With this superior pose of believing nothing they delude people and create confusion when confusion is fatal.

The bourgeoisie has devised various ways of attack on the masses, all of which can be broadly classified under two heads—(1) The frontal attack and (2) the flank movement. The frontal attack against the masses is carried on through the various political parties they have organised—from liberal to fascist parties. The task of these parties is to oppose the revolution at any cost—by force, terror or subterfuge. They want to stop the spread of revolutionary ideas and organisations at all costs and by every means at their disposal. The nationalists and the fascists fulfil this role in every country of the world.

There is another group of people who have taken upon themselves the task of toning down the revolutionary temper of the masses. They join the masses and their movements with this end in view. They are the socialists of all lands. They acknowledge publicly the aims and ideals of revolution and thus gain the confidence of the people. And then they start their sinister game by giving their own interpretation of the revolution. Thus they reduce the revolution to a mockery. These socialists adorn

the various 'radical' organisations created by the bourgeoisie with the sole idea of opposing the revolution.

This frontal attack is supplemented with flank attacks. There the priests, poets and though the last, but by no means the least, the petty bourgeois sceptics come to the service of the bourgeoisie. These people do not oppose the revolution openly nor do they try to change the fundamental principles of revolution by at first warming themselves into the confidence of the people as the socialists do. They let people know that they belong to no political party and are not tied to any particular political ideology. This 'above class' deception is the trade secret of these men.

One meets this species in all sorts of places. They exude the odour of scepticism from their insufferable personalities. A vulgar and senile smile of sneer flickers around their mouth and the expression of their eyes is as indefinite and negative as their entire personality. They are the unsexed eunuchs of the thought-world. In every discussion they exhale the foul breath of doubt and thereby frustrate the efforts of the people to have positive ideals. Capitalism is of course bad but then. . . . Transformation of the capitalist social order is an absolute necessity but then. . . . Oh, I also believe in communism but then. . . . This is how the sceptic speaks; negating every assertion by a sly and emasculated expression of doubt.

With some this is a question of their mental imbecility, —the intellectual indetermination covered with the slime of sceptical pose. With others it is a contrivance for sowing confusion in the ranks of the enemies of the bourgeois social order. These sceptics are the worshippers of the status quo, of the existing bourgeois social order. Their main social function is to raise doubts in the minds of the people about the necessity of change and about revolution and the new social order.



The nearer comes the hour of destruction of capitalism, the greater grows the number of these petty bourgeois sceptics. They have not the mental virility to grasp the law of historical development, to welcome the growing storm of revolution and to identify themselves with the cause of the masses. Led by social development into a blind alley, robbed by history of the power to strike a new road, helpless and weak the members of the petty bourgeois class turn sceptics. Scepticism is the loss of faith in humanity, nay, in every positive ideal. It is negation dressed up in the rags of pseudo-intellectualism.

In Europe, crisis-stricken, bleeding and tired, the more the all-round crisis engendered by the decaying capitalism deepens, the more rapidly the petty bourgeois intelligentsia grows sceptic.

Unable to extricate themselves from the morass, they cling to the past, though they occasionally pelt a few intellectual stones at the past, only to show off their progressiveness. Bernard Shaw is the most typical example of this class. Shaw is wholly negative, a jester of the bourgeois court whose sole aim is to rouse his phlegmatic masters' dormant humours, including their spleen, to make them angry and to make them laugh by turn. The bourgeoisie knows very well that all Bernard Shaw's fuming and frothing is wholly harmless as Shaw never draws the necessary conclusions from his analysis of social reality. He only knows how to mock and sneer and how to make fun of things. He uses his demonic power to tickle the world to laughter, when all his powers should have burst into flames and not into laughter.

No ideology, tactic or strategy in our times can be anything but international in character and application.

In India too the three-fanged attack of the bourgeoisie on the revolutionary masses is easily discernible.

One is direct attack, the second is an attack from within in the garb of fellow-travellers, the third is the attack hurled at the masses from the 'above-class' and non-party plane. This is the plane of the sceptics.

We must be on our guard against this third variety of enemies. They are more dishonest and sly than the other two groups.

The sceptics are the enemies of the people and of the revolution. They are the hidden hands of the bourgeoisie ever ready to strike at the heart of the masses by sowing confusion in their ranks and thereby weakening them. The superabundant growth of the sceptics in our times proves on the one hand, the decadence of bourgeois social order and its lack of intellectual integrity, and on the other; marks the conscious effort of the bourgeoisie to weaken the revolutionary movement by sowing doubts in the minds of the masses.

## THE AESTHETE

He stands like a rock in the midst of the flowing and ever-changing reality of the phenomenal world. He stands by, watches the fury of the waves, and is untouched by life's froth and fury. Detached and unperturbed he looks at things and men as they flow unceasingly in the current of existence, swirling and meandering, smoothly or in mad elemental fury. He looks at things and men, both in their static and kinetic aspects, with the sole idea of their representation. He is the most detached observed of life's flow. He is our aesthete.

To look at things as they are and as they flow, without the least desire to change them, and solely with the idea of representing them objectively, is of the essence of aestheticism. At least this is what the aesthetes claim for their cult—*aestheticism*.

Is this claim of the aesthetes tenable? Under the conditions of the society which is divided into classes, is absolute objectivity, so far as it concerns human existence, possible? Can the subjective attitude be totally eliminated from the aesthetic representation? No, it is not so. This claim to absolute objectivity for the sake of 'pure' representation is a hoax, and the attitude of the observer of human life, without the slightest desire to change it, is thoroughly unethical.

One can only see an object through a particular set of eyes and judge it according to a particular frame of mind. And these eyes are trained to see things in the way the mind has trained them to see things; and the mind in its turn has been tuned consciously and unconsciously by the

milieu of the individual, and which is predominantly his class-milieu.

Thus, the aesthete's 'pure' objectivity and 'pure' representation are both tinged with the subjectivity of the class the aesthete belongs to. The illumined part of the aesthete's consciousness and the dark depth of his subconscious mind are all tinged with the class-colour. This to a very large extent explains the difference in representation of the same objects by the aesthetes. True, there are differences in the representation of the same thing by writers and artists hailing from the same class, but those differences are in the nuances, and not in the fundamentals. The talk of objectivity untinged by class-coloration is therefore an aesthetic falsehood.

Each and every representation of human life, with its problems and values, is tinged consciously or unconsciously with the class-hue of the person who paints them. There is no escape from this. The 'pure' representation of the aesthete's pretension has a deeper motive than what appears on the surface. The 'pure' representation is an above class' stunt under cover of which the aesthete cleverly smuggles in his class-point of view. The aesthete's much-vaunted claim to non-partisanship for the sake of 'pure' representation is thoroughly dishonest. The aesthete is a partisan, and a passionate partisan at that, of the existing social order. This partisanship he dexterously paints with the colour of non-partisanship, and he leaves no stones unturned to make us believe that he does all that for the sake of 'pure' representation.

To observe the objects in their flow, without in any way colouring that observation with the tint of the desire to change them, is another claim of the aesthetes. But, what is actually the nature of this aesthetic observation? Is it just sensation, that is to say, just the automatic reaction

of the senses in their immediate and initial contact with the objects? No, it is not. If it were just that, no representation would be possible.

Aesthetic observation is not pure sensation, nor is it purely emotional in character. The conscious judgment of social values, which is an inseparable attribute of the human mind, unavoidably enters into the aesthetic observation of the individual. That is to say, the aesthetic observation and representation are saturated through and through with the elements of intellectual judgment. Thus, the aesthetic observation has an intellectual element in it, and the aesthetic representation has the tacit approval of the aesthete's intellect.

The pretention that in the aesthetic observation it is possible to eliminate the desire to change the social reality is nothing but an admission by the aesthete of the fact that he finds in the present social setting nothing that upsets his sense of values. He does not take exception to the existing social order, simply because he does not consider that it needs any change.

This is the admission that is implicit in the aesthetic attitude; and that lies hidden under the aesthete's pretention of 'pure' representation, unalloyed with the desire to change the reality. He approves of the existing social order, and for that reason does not think that alteration is necessary. And for the same reason he disapproves of other peoples' disapproval of the present social order, and of their desire to change it. But of course the aesthete does not do all this in a straightforward manner and with the candour of honest intellectual conviction. He does all this in the name of objectivity and 'pure' representation!

But leaving aside everything else, is this aesthetic attitude of the passive observer of the social reality a correct attitude from the ethical standpoint? Has any one the

moral right to look at the sorrows and miseries of human beings with unruffled equanimity, and all that for the sake of 'pure' objectivity and 'pure' representation! Should one for the sake of 'pure' representation watch passively the sufferings of a human being, without making the least effort to relieve the individual of his sufferings? Could it be ethical to treat human sufferings as only the stuff for weaving aesthetic patterns from?

No, such an attitude is ethically impermissible. The aesthete's attitude towards life is negative, cowardly and wholly unethical.

There are tragedies in human life which are too poignant to be looked at with the absolutely disinterested objectivity of the aesthete's pretended claim. Of course, as we have already said, for the aesthete also there is no such objectivity. The aesthete is as much a partisan in thought and feeling as any body else; and his 'pure' objectivity and 'pure' representation are nothing but dishonest covers for his active interest in and his lively support of the conduct and of the norm of the rulers of the present social order. You aesthetes, proud dwellers in the ivory tower, your tower of unalloyed objectivity and 'pure' representation is not white at all. It is black with falsehood and cowardice and with lack of sympathy for suffering humanity.

The ivory tower stinks to heaven. Demolish it if you have any honesty left in you or it is sure to topple down and disappear for ever in the surging waves of angry humanity.

## THE HUMANIST

THEY only are the genuine lovers of Man, for it is only they who with divine alchemy have been able to reduce man to his ultimate essence and to love him only because of that. They are the humanists! By their penetrating vision, they are able to shear man of all his social wools, and to see him in his 'eternal' and rock-bottom nakedness. And how they love man shorn of his social reality; man, reduced by them to an unreal abstraction!

The cult of the 'abstract man' is of the essence of humanism. By this cult the humanist relieves himself of all the responsibilities of social change. He cleverly bypasses the problems of social inequality and avoids a clash with the upholders of the social status quo. Bereft of his social content, man becomes a phantom, just the mirage of the irrational desert of the mind, and the will o' the wisp of the mental marsh. Viewed from the angle of social reality, man is seen to be divided into classes, that is to say, into economic categories of contending and conflicting forces. This differentiation begun at first in the economic sphere, extends itself to the mental realm; and tinges the entire personality of the individual with its class-hue.

Seen with the eyes of unreal abstraction, man appears as an undifferentiated entity, as a primal metaphysical substance. But seen with the eyes of social reality, man is found to be divided into classes in which the interests of class-bound men clash, and clash constantly. To the uncritical eye what appears to be the basic similarity between men of different classes; to the discerning, appears in quite the contrary light. It is then realised that the

chasm between them is wide and deep, and the difference in the outlook of life, great and fundamental.

In short, the 'abstract man' of the humanist's conception, does not exist at all. This 'abstract man' is a hoax. It is the most dangerous fabrication of the petty bourgeois humanists, manufactured with the idea of blurring the social reality of classes. It is the narcotic used by the humanists to deaden the class-consciousness of the exploited.

The humanist's love for the 'abstract man', for 'man in his essence', if deeply probed into, will reveal his love for the exploiter, the oppressor and the rich parasite. In other words, under the pretext of humanism, the humanist upholds the exploiter; and his love for 'man in his essence' is just a stalking horse to hide his love for the ruling class and his approval of the existing social (class) order established by the bourgeoisie for its own interest.

One cannot possibly love persons who gorge themselves with the fruits of other peoples' labour and leave them to hunger and destitution. One can not very well shower love on persons who thrive on the misery of others. But this is exactly what the worshipper of the cult of the 'abstract man', I mean the humanist, does. His humanism, under the pretext of universality and all-embracingness, takes into its arm the exploiters and the oppressors of every variety and shade.

This has been the game of the humanists since the time this species came to prominence with the beginning of capitalism. They have done their best to protect the oppressors from the wrath of the oppressed, and to thrust the down-trodden into the bog of futile appeal to the tyrants. They have always, advocated the treacherous method of 'appeal to the conscience', have systematically spread the myth of the possibility of changing the hearts of the tyrants; and thus have created in the minds of the

people the dangerous illusion that the social transformation which would end tyranny and exploitation, could be a gift of the exploiters and the tyrants themselves!

From Utopian Socialism to Gandhism—every variety of humanism has this for its hall mark.

No, the love for the 'abstract man', for man shorn of his social content, is no love for man at all. It is just fawning to the ruling class, support of the existing social order, and justification of the criminality of the tyrants.

Humanism to be real, must acknowledge the reality of the existence of the classes in human society. It should recognise that the monopolistic usurpation of the social means of production by the few, is the negation of humanism, and is the breeding ground of all savagery and violence. And ultimately, it should realise that true humanism consists in taking the side of the oppressed and the down-trodden against the human vultures who feed themselves fat on living humanity.

True humanism must be class-conscious; it must be partisan. It should not don the deceptive robe of 'love for all', and prostrate itself before the false god—'the abstract man'. Its universality should embrace only the oppressed, and its activity should reveal the gem of genuine humanism which is embedded in the heart of the masses in revolt.

Like everything else in the bourgeois world, humanism is also engulfed in crisis. It must either break through the limitations of 'abstract man' and 'above class' universality imposed on it by the bourgeoisie for its own class-interests, and save itself by espousing unequivocally the cause of the oppressed humanity, or it must rot and stink as it is doing at present, and finally decay.

Humanists without humanism, beware! Million eyes are watching you, you are on trial.