REFLECTIONS OF A WAYFARER.

ز دل فگار مجنون بود اگہی کسے را ۔
کہ زخان رصل لیلی نمک چشیدہ باشد *

—*Hyder.*

In July last, when I felt too ill to continue my work in Court and hurried home to my bed, I had not the faintest notion of the Iliad of woe that was about to burst upon me. I took it then as a passing indisposition—a mere sailing cloud—but it turned out to be the gateway to sufferings untold. Into the details of those sufferings I shall not enter, 'for what plague is there that claims respect?' But those weary days and sleepless nights of alternating hope and despair were not without their uses. They were an interlude between the two illusive plays of life, or rather moments meant for sober meditation and retrospect.

My mind reverted to the days of childhood and of youth,—now wrapped in a golden haze of romance. Beautiful, blissful were those days, said I, when others lived to think for you; to shoulder your cares for you; to bestow their unselfish love upon you; to make your little world a heaven of unalloyed joy for you. Alas! Those too were the days when, immersed in happiness, there were no fears to see across our joys and weep. Every little event, every trifling incident I recalled, rehabilitated, re-invested with reality; and intense, incommunicable was my joy at this process. But this momentary mood was invariably followed by increasingly acute pain at the thought that such times were really now no more. Has not the poet said: 'A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things'? I dwelt in the past, fondly dwelt therein, relieving the tedium of self-torturing leisure by chasing dismal thoughts away. But delightful as these musings were,—for they brought to life again the dear old days gone by, one question persistently pressed for an answer. Have those days left any permanent gift behind? Or were they merely bright, picturesque leaves, crumpled, shrivelled, dried-up, blown now for ever away? Yes! was my cheerful, complacent reply.

Cradled in one of the finest libraries in India and brought up in a Home of Learning it was there that I laid the foundation of that over-mastering passion for books which the passing years have only strengthened and intensified. This passion, indeed, was a hereditary gift and to me that gift was made without restraint or reserve.

There in that literary sanctuary, as I looked back through the mist of years, I saw Moulvi Abdul Hayy (1), the greatest scholar of his age; there I saw the middle-aged Shibli just rising into fame, burrowed in books; there I saw the Bilgramis, the true custodians of letters in India; there I saw Sir Charles Lyall, a genuine lover of Arab culture, lost in wonder and amazement at the priceless treasures of learning stored therein; there too I beheld a stream of literary pilgrims, attracted from all parts of the world, come and go with their doubts settled, their difficulties solved, their frontier of knowledge enlarged and extended.

It was not, however, merely a Home of Learning but one of freedom and of independence too, of freedom from deadening conventions and of true independence of the soul. Nothing was accepted on trust. Nothing was held to be above test or scrutiny. No homage was ever stained with servility, and no obedience ever rendered which was inconsistent or unworthy of the dignity of man.

These two gifts, love of books and love of independence, were then the precious gifts of that Home where I was brought up and to both of these gifts I have clung with ever increasing devotion, though they have served no temporal purpose nor have advanced any worldly cause.

Love of learning is at a discount and love of independence too hazardous in my country. We live in the days of triflers and trimmers, and political flirts. But why complain? Has not Amiel truly said: ' It is a sign of weakness to complain of the injustice of the world. What right have we to expect justice from it?"

If Amiel warns us against too hasty a complaint, Iqbâl bids us hope for redress in the days to come.

نا امید ستم ز یاران قدیم •
طور من سوزد که می اید کلیم *

Next to the thoughts of those vanished days, an incomparable solace in my afflictions, the five daily calls to prayer heard from a mosque close by re-opened the religious vein in me. To hear those magical words, the Azan, so stirring, so uplifting, so divinely moving.

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(1) His *Tarajim-ul-Hanafiya* has been published at St. Petersburg.

was a wondrous experience to me. They brought me nearer unto God and made His presence a living reality to me.

What can comfort or assuage more the pain or grief of man than the word of God? And the word of God stands for naught but love and peace. How foolish then, said I, are the religious quarrels which divide mankind, spreading fire, shedding blood, destroying peace! Religion, to be sure, is not a formula but a state of the mind—mind well-attuned to God's will, intent on doing His bidding, resigned to His commands. It is the change of heart that religion claims and insists upon, not meaningless prayers and rites, not unintelligent counting of beads, change of heart from selfish, sordid aims to purer, higher ones. Can such a state of mind countenance or enjoin ill-will and strife? To me all religions are and have always been alike. To me all places of worship are sacred and all Faiths, manifestations of His will.

It is impossible for me to understand that mentality which avers and avows aversion from or hatred of other religions than one's own. But if the truth were told, religion in India to-day is but an aspect of politics. Nothing can move the Easterner more surely or more swiftly than an appeal to his religion and that appeal the politicians always effectively make for their own immediate ends.

When politics becomes more patriotic and less personal these uses and abuses of religions will automatically cease. But we are yet a long, long way off that happy consummation.

What has spoilt the Eastern character is its extreme subservience, notably to English influences. Eastern tradition is at a discount. Eastern literature has no marketable value and Eastern culture is naught now but something to ignore or scoff at. Religion, too, with the majority, is a mere pastime or at best a mere stake in the game of politics. Such is the rich harvest which Western education has borne on the Indian soil!

This downward course continued uninterrupted for a quarter of a century or more, and I recall with shame and regret those days when my countrymen prided themselves on the ignorance of their mother-tongue and joyously masqueraded in Western ways and manners.

Sir Asutosh Mukherji and Gandhi saw and combated this evil and sought to arrest its growth, the former in Bengal, the latter all over India.

If there was one man in Bengal with burning zeal for his country it was Sir Asutosh. It is not possible for those that did not know him intimately to even distantly imagine the love he bore to and the sacrifices he made for his Province. Though at times he despaired of success and felt despondent and cheerless, yet optimism was the dominant note

of his character and fulfilment of duty the supremest aim of his life. No star on ribbon ever diverted his course or deflected him from his purpose. Great as an educationist; yet greater by far, to my mind, was he as a statesman of penetrating vision.

To control and to crush the apish instincts of his countrymen, to set before them the glory of their own intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, to acquaint them with the achievements of the West, to make them live a richer, fuller life of their own, he enlarged the bounds of knowledge and appropriated for his beloved University of Calcutta enormous tracts of hitherto neglected learning.

The revival of Sanskrit learning; the introduction of the Bengali language and literature as a course of study in the highest examination of this University; the opening of French and German classes; the encouragement of sectional historical studies, such as the Mahratta history or the French Revolution, the inclusion of Islam and its civilisation in the higher studies of Bengal—are they not splendid achievements pointing to the unrivalled wisdom of that excellent man? This was the surest step to getting rid of the intellectual bondage which the genius of Macaulay had imposed on England's Indian wards. And, to be sure, without striking off the intellectual fetters first, all talk about autonomy, self-government, Swaraj and what not, is a pure chimera, a hopeless futility.

Sir Asutosh strove to endow his countrymen with the qualifications necessary for civic duties and political freedom. Here lies his undying monument. But while Sir Asutosh opened the eyes of Bengal to the rich and glittering prizes which awaited the worker in the field of Eastern culture, Gandhi, using other means, showed to the world at large the capacity of Indians for union, co-operation, concerted measures; for widespread political activity; for defiance and resistance to the Bureaucracy when the views of the latter clashed with the popular will. Set-backs there have been; set-backs there will be, but the path of progress, once opened, is never blocked or barred again.

In this strain I mused while the night waxed and waned and the shadows rose and fell. At no other time do the thoughts flow more effortlessly than at night. Nature is in repose, the toiling man at rest; save for stray revellers anxious to make the most of a petty, moth-like existence, one scarcely hears a human sound. There are no companions awake to exchange ideas; to administer comfort; to share one's joy or sorrow, except the soft, shining stars and the gentle caressing breeze. Even in illness it is a time of respite and comparative repose. On one such night of solemn stillness the idea of death suddenly flashed upon my mind.

What is death and why its terror? To the religious it promises a heaven free from strife; to the unhappy it signifies an end of sufferings, and to all, in outer seeming, it holds out the prospect of unbroken rest and sleep. But, all this notwithstanding, it is and remains the Prince of terrors. And yet, to be sure, death loses its sting or fear in a serious illness. One rarely thinks of it then,—never, at any rate, in a spirit of tremor or anxiety. The ebbing strength brings serenity and flickering hope, firm, steadfast faith. Resignation to nature's fiat and obedience to His all-powerful will strengthen and fortify the weakness of man. He is ready to face the inevitable when the inevitable comes.

But what after all is death? Is it, as Lucretius thought, a happy release from earthly ills, or is it as Mir Taqi thought a mere stage on the road to perfection's goal? It veritably is a limit set to our pilgrimage here below.

What then must the thought of death inspire or enjoin? Not fear but effort, not listless apathy but resolute endeavour to make the most of the time allotted to us here beneath the starry canopy of heaven; to do our bit and to do it well.

In the scheme of creation every human being has his task definitely set, peremptorily fixed. Happy is he who knows and acts upon it!

Thinking on lines thus indicated and standing perilously near death's door I thought of the account of my stewardship which I might soon be called upon to render to my Maker. And the lines of Zawq kept ringing in my ears:

نہ ایا خاک بھی رستہ سمجھہ میں عمر رفتہ کا -
اگر سمجھے تو داغ معصیت کو نقش پا سمجھے *

The retrospect was aught but pleasing. It was dismal, terrifying. What a welter of trifles and vice! The past, stripped of the enveloping mist, lay open before me like a clear, legible scroll. There I saw the worship of false gods, the pursuit of vain ideals, the hankering after fleeting trifles, the lack of humility, the absence of steadfastness in truth and not an infrequent shrinking from right, and that want of faith and trust in the most High which is life's dearest asset and man's strongest stay and support. But to every cloud there is a silver lining and here too, in the encircling gloom, there was one bright, shining spot. Amidst distractions, cares, struggles, my love and loyalty to learning never faltered or fell. And my publications are my witnesses to my unwearying devotion to the Goddess of Learning. Well I might say with Ghalib:

گـو میں رہا رہین ستمہای روزگار -
لیکن ترے خیال سے غافل نہیں رہا *

I rejoiced at my output—dear reader, forgive my vanity —and my agitated mind was quietened at the idea that mine had been not altogether a wasted life, though in happier circumstances the result might, perhaps, have been better and richer still.

What is it that endures? Not gold or silver, not even stately mansions, but good work that lightens the burden, sheds light, uplifts the soul of man!

Withhold here I must not my humble tribute of thanks to those 'dead but sceptered sovereigns' who kept me company in my sick room. Apart from those Persian poets—Hafiz, Ibn Yamin, Talib-i-Kalim, Ghalib—my never-deserting friends who have always stood by me, firm and four-square, in sunshine and in rain, I made the acquaintance of Haydar-i-Kaluj (2)—a poet of distinctive excellence. Drawn from a humble station in life, without the accident of birth or the advantages of education, with no endowment other than what was natural and inborn he warbled his notes, spontaneous, effortless. In purity of diction, in grace, in simplicity, in directness, in the power that touches and makes the soul captive, in the wisdom that peers through the outward aspect of things, in the expression of worldly experiences that make or mar the joy of living, in his entire treatment of and outlook on life he shows himself a thinker and poet of the very first rank and renown.

Any poem, picked up at random, will reveal the breadth of his vision; the sanity of his views; the richness of his experience; the ravishing grace and charm of his simple, unaffected diction.

In reading him you feel, as you can only feel in reading great masters, your own inarticulate thoughts echoed and expressed, your own experiences rehearsed, your own secret joys and sorrows revived; you feel, in short, the comradeship of one like unto you but endowed with superhuman wisdom and grace.

بـود ا کثر حدیثم دال بـر حال کسان حیدر -
نہ تنہا ہرچہ گویم حسب حال خویشتن گویم *

I loved and revelled in his company. He brought light and comfort to me.

(2) For his life, see the Catalogue (Vol. II of Persian Poetry) of *Khuda Bukhsh Library*, Patna, pp. 139-141, and the authorities cited therein.

. But not only Persian poets,—others too helped me to dispel the gloom of a sick room. Catullus and Horace heartened me against the vicissitudes of fate, Livy filled me with patriotic ardour, and Tacitus supplied me with a store of political wisdom.

To Mackail's Latin Literature I owe a heavy debt. A work of surpassing excellence, it is a joy for ever. In his company I renewed the friendship of the immortal band of Latin authors who, in the language of Edward Gibbon, will continue to instruct the last generation of mortals. I would add 'continue to delight as well.' This is the note, dated the 26th August, 1926, in my copy:

"During my recent illness (when death seemed to be knocking at the door) this book was a fount of inexhaustible joy to me. Afternoon after afternoon I sat, in the sickroom, revelling in its felicitous diction and soul-uplifting thoughts. Old friends gently glided before the mind's eye, recalling, if not renewing, the golden days of youth. Pain, anxiety, fear—all I forgot in its all-absorbing delight. Oh! the magic of Learning! Does it not conquer and triumph over all things terrestrial!"

Nor can I here forget the sermons of John Henry Newman. Apart from the language of which Newman was a supreme magician, they are the enduring possessions of mankind. They uplift and enthral you; they stir strange moods in the heart; they present virtue, and goodness and purity in the most lovable of lights; they set forth, in striking vividness, the transitoriness of this life; the vanity of worldly pursuits, the necessity of living amid realities; the realization of the Divine presence; the fortitude that flincheth not in trial; the strength of purpose that defieth temptation; the inward peace that goodness ensureth, and the fulness of life which the true religious spirit bringeth to man.

Free from sectarianism, free from cramping narrow-mindedness, full to the brim with love of God and Truth, sweet in their appeal, reasonable in their argument, rich and forcible in their diction, severe and unbending in rectitude,—who can fail to feel their ineffable charm or resist their compelling grace and beauty? They refresh; they stimulate the fainting courage of man.

Those days of convalescence,—how peaceful, restful they were! I pondered over life and destiny. I read until prudence called a halt and I looked forward to a quiet chat with friends in the evening.

It was a brief season of ideal existence, such as I would have fashioned for myself, if I were shaping or settling my destiny. No cares disturbed my calm; no thought of the morrow awakened the slightest uneasiness; no uncongenial occupation ruffled the silent march of time.

To these inestimable blessings were added—the greatest blessing of all—the devotion of a loving wife who shrank from no sacrifice to make things easy for me. She added sunlight unto daylight cheering, comforting, encouraging, and ever and anon, reviving my drooping spirits.

Of the friends that visited me during those days there was one whose visit I always longingly looked forward to. It was Mr. Wajid Ali. He lifted the gloom—if gloom there was; he shed consolation; he took me out of myself. Animated by one common ideal, striving for one and the self-same goal, we talked and talked freely of Life and Letters. The one subject we never tired of discussing was the present condition and the future prospects of the Muslim community.

Is the Muslim Community doomed for ever to sterility and decay? Are the signs of the times propitious or otherwise? We took a cheerful view of things and we perceived changes indicating unmistakable tokens of steady progress in the right direction.

The enormous strides in education, the growing sense of co-operation, the realization of Islamic duties, the enlarging spirit of independence, the desire to fight their own battle, the new-born contempt for favour and nepotism, the attention paid to trade and commerce, the pride in Muslim culture, the setting-up of societies to safeguard Muslim interests and to protect the Muslim cause, the renewal of the bond of Muslim brotherhood, the most enduring of Islam's gifts to man,—are they not indications, manifest and infallible, of the new era dawning all over the countries of Islam and the Muslims? We rejoiced at the prospect and we rejoice all the more at the speed at which these results have been achieved.

There is no occasion, then, for despair or even despondency.

We doubt not Islam will effect as the years go by greater and yet greater cohesion; will inculcate more effectively than ever the lesson of self-reliance and self-respect; will harmonize differences, stir aspirations, lift its professors to the position they once held in the world, if not to one higher still. Islam has realised its danger and Muslims their opportunity. Islam need fear neither advancing science nor broadening civilization, for it rests on no miracles which Science will explode nor on dogmas which broadening culture may scorn or reject. It is free from all encumbrances, and a philosophic theist, in the language of Edward Gibbon, will hardly hesitate to subscribe to its cardinal tenet—There is no God but God and Mohammed is His Prophet!

Our discussions were unending and we brought to them fresh zeal and zest, new points of view, changing angles of vision.

The two thoughts that weighed me down, in those days, with grief incalculable were the thoughts of my historical work still undone and the future of my Library. Here lay before me the collection of a lifetime, gathered together with fond love and care,—one of the finest collections of Islamic works here or elsewhere, ready to satisfy the demands of the most exacting of scholars or the most omnivorous of readers,—here it lay before me with a dark and precarious future. Afflicting was the idea that it should be dispersed or pass into unworthy hands. Sad was the prospect of an eternal farewell to it. With loving eyes I surveyed it—with tender affection I brooded over its future. No less painfully did the idea of my historical work—still undone—sting and smite me. Where now was the hope of my youth, the dream of my manhood, the one engrossing ambition of my life,—where now was the History of Islam? There I lay on my bed, doubtful of the morrow, doubtful whether the sun would ever shine on me, or the stars ever wink or the moon ever cast her languid glances at me.

I had failed, failed in every thing, was my soul's distressing summing-up against me. Harsh as this summing-up seemed, it was in perfect unison with the verdict pronounced years ago in 'Maxims and Reflections' and 'Love offerings'—the two spontaneous outbursts of the soul against the crushing tyranny of fate.

ناتمامی نـا توانی نـا امیدی نارسی -

همنے بھر رکھا ھے کیا کیا دامن فریاد میں *