



The Bugbear of Democracy, Freedom and Equality (II)

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There are types of society that are by no means "above," but on the contrary "below" caste; societies in which there prevails what the traditional sociologies term a "confusion of castes"; societies in which men are regarded primarily if not, indeed, exclusively as economic animals, and the expression "standard of living," dear to the advertising manufacturer, has only quantitative connotations. Such societies as these have, indeed, "progressed" toward, and perhaps attained to "the pure and 'inorganic' multiplicity of a kind of social atomism, and to the exercise of a purely mechanical activity in which nothing properly human subsists so that a man can adopt any profession or even change it at will as if this profession were something purely exterior to himself" (René Guénon).

The mere existence of these great proletarian aggregates, whose members, exploited by one another, pullulate in "capitals" that have no longer any organic connection with the bodies on which they grew, but depend on world markets that must be opened by "wars of pacification" and continually stimulated by the "creation of new wants" by suggestive advertisement, is destructive of the more highly differentiated traditional societies in which the individual has a status determined by his function and in no sense merely by wealth or poverty; their existence is automatically destructive of the individual whom its "efficiency" reduces to the level of a producer of raw materials, destined to be worked up in the victor's factories, and again unloaded upon the "backward" peoples who must accept their annual quota of gadgets, if business is to prosper. Even such a good "progressive" as Mr. Brailsford is forced to ask whether man "is not too wicked to be trusted with powerful machines!"

The economic results of commercial exploitation ("world trade") are typically summarized in Albert Schweitzer's words, "whenever the timber trade is good, permanent famine reigns in the Ogowe region." When thus "commerce settles on every tree," the spiritual consequences are even more devastating; "civilization" can destroy the souls as well as the bodies of those whom it infects. Of course, I am aware that there are plenty of Westernized Orientals who are perfectly willing and even anxious to welcome the *dona ferentes* of industry without for a moment hesitating to examine these gift horses; but strange as it may appear to the Wallaces who would like to "get (us) started on the path of industrialism," it is precisely from the standpoint of the caste system that an Indian can most confidently and effectively criticize modern Western civilization.

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Among the most severe of these critics are to be found some of those deceptively Westernized Orientals who have themselves lived and studied longest in Europe and America. To such people it is clear that, in the undifferentiated social antheaps of the Western world, the "common man" finds his labours so detestable that he is always hankering after a "leisure state"; that this "common man" is in fact a mass product in a world of uniform mass productions and universal compulsory "education"; that the "collective wisdom of a literate (western) people" is little better than a collective ignorance; and that there can be no comparison between the proletarian "common man" of the West with the cultured but illiterate peasant of the traditional "community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom" (G. L. Kittredge). He sees that it is precisely in the most "individualistic" societies that the fewest individuals are to be found. It certainly does not surprise him to find native observers saying that in the West "there remains the show of civilization, without any of its realities" (A. N. Whitehead), or admitting that "while inventions and mechanical devices have been developed to a tremendous extent, there has been no moral or spiritual development among men to equal that process" (J. C. Hambro); describing modern society as a "murderous machine, with no conscience, and no ideals" (G. La Piana), or recognizing that "civilization, as we now have it, can only end in disaster" (G. H. Estabrooks).

Just *what* is it that you, who are so conscious of your "civilizing mission," have to offer us? Can you wonder that, as Rabindranath Tagore said, "there is no people in the whole of Asia which does not look upon Europe with fear and suspicion" or that we dread the prospect of an alliance of the imperialistic powers whose "Atlantic Charter" was not meant to apply to India, and will not be applied to China if it can be avoided? An aphorism several times repeated in Buddhist scripture runs, "war breeds hatred, because the conquered are unhappy"; and that is even more true of economic than of military wars, for in the former no holds whatever are barred, and there are no truces of any intention to make peace.

In any discussion of the caste system, just as would be the case if it were a matter of kingship, we have always to deal with a host of errors that are constantly repeated even by otherwise well-informed Western writers. One of the chief of these is a view that is stated as a fact by the authors of *Twentieth Century India* (Institute of Pacific Relations, 1944, p. 17), viz., that: "The caste system is peculiar to Hinduism." On this subject let me quote Hocart again: He says in his Preface that something at least will have been accomplished "if the reader can be persuaded that the Indian caste system is not, as is generally believed, an isolated phenomenon, but belongs to a widely diffused social-category (*genre*). And since it is not an isolated phenomenon, it cannot be understood if we isolate it." Rather less than half of his book has to do with India; the remainder deals with Persia, the Hebrews, South Sea Islands, Greece, and Egypt, and one may add that considerable space might have been given to Japan and to the feudal system in Europe.

All we can say is that in India the vocational structure of society has been more strongly emphasized, and has longer survived intact than elsewhere. Another error is that of the scholars who attribute the caste system in India to the enslavement of the darker indigenous races by blonde conquerors. It suffices to point out, as Hocart has, that the four castes are connected with the four quarters and are of four "colours" — white, red, yellow, and black — and that to be consistent, the ethnic theory ought to have presupposed

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invaders of three separate colours, a white race becoming the priests, a red race the rulers, and a yellow race the merchants of the invaded territory! The only real colour distinction is between the three and the one, the colours in question being respectively those of day and night, or "gold" and "iron"; in the divine operation the Supreme Identity assumes now the one, now the other, at will. The distinction is only partially reflected in the sensible world; the actual colour of Indian peoples varies from blonde to black, and it is by no means the case that all Brahmins are blonde or that all Sûdras are black.