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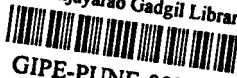
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Rabindranath Tagore.
Selected from the Speeches of
the Poet by A. I. Soares, M.A., LL.B.**

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LECTURES AND ADDRESSES
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LECTURES & ADDRESSES
BY
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

*Selected from the Speeches
of the Poet*

BY
ANTHONY X. SOARES, M.A., LL.B.
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, THE COLLEGE, BARODA

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PREFACE

THIS little volume is an attempt to bring together in a convenient form a selection from the lectures and addresses of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore with a view to presenting to the reader a coherent account of his life, thought, convictions and ideals.

In 1914, when Mr. Yeats found that the prose translations of the poet's *Gitanjali* had stirred his blood as nothing had for years, he could not help regretting that he knew nothing of their author's life nor of the movements that had made them possible. Scarcely had anyone at that time, outside Bengal, heard even the name of the poet-philosopher. To-day the case is very different : his name is greeted with enthusiasm, wonder and reverence in almost every part of the civilized world, and pictures of him are to be found in thousands of homes. In most of the great cities of both hemispheres surging crowds have been held spell-bound by the melody of his voice, even when they did not understand the language of his addresses or recitations ; larger numbers have been fascinated by his refined and well-chiselled lineaments, which, together with his silver locks, his flowing beard, his eyes full of mystic inspiration, and his long and loose robes, have recalled

to their minds the vision of a prophet of Judea or of a seer of ancient India. No poet, ancient or modern, has been received during his lifetime with the honour and respect with which Dr. Tagore has been greeted, whether in the West or in the East, and there is scarcely any cultivated language into which some, at least, of his works have not been translated.

The almost world-wide manifestation of regard for the 'Poet Laureate of Asia' and of interest in his work has created a universal desire to know all that is possible of his person, his home, surroundings, activities and, especially, of his opinions on those social, moral and political problems of the day which are exercising the mind of mankind—of the man in the street just as much as of the social and political worker or of the thinker in academic centres of learning. There is an innate instinct in man which urges him to find out as much as he can of the life and thought of those whom he reverences, and he regards no fact as too irrelevant or insignificant for his enquiry. The craving to get at the details of a man's career and his views was never so insistent as it is at the present day, perhaps because of the efforts, not wholly irreproachable, which are made by the press of to-day to satisfy the appetite for such fare.

This volume is an attempt to meet this desire in a manner which we trust will be helpful to the class of reader who seeks to understand the mind and art of an author, rather than to flit over mere *personalia*, the interest in which cannot but be transitory. Any value which it may possess lies in the

fact that the details of the poet's life, opinions and views, here presented, are in the author's own words.

Many biographical studies of the poet have been published, and the number of articles and monographs claiming to explain the sources of his poetic appeal and the character of his philosophical belief and moral teaching is legion ; brilliant and not wholly unconvincing though many of them are, none will venture to deny that nothing can surpass in truth and fidelity a man's straightforward and disinterested exposition of his own personality and creed.

In making the selection from the lectures and addresses we have, therefore, confined ourselves exclusively to such speeches of Dr. Tagore's as give an insight into his views and individuality. It is he who speaks and tells us of himself. The ancient precept of the oracle is ' Know thyself ' ; we thought that its most fitting complement would be ' Interpret thyself.'

In these speeches the poet-philosopher tells us of his early life and of the kind of education he received ; he describes his school at Shanti-Niketan to which he has consecrated his energy and wisdom, the methods of teaching employed there, and the nature of the discipline enforced. He then expounds, as usual, with a wealth of analogy and illustration, his views on the much-vexed question as to what constitutes progress and civilization, and defines the great distinction that exists between the connotations of these two terms. In the next speech he denounces

modern industrialism, and does not tire of reiterating the obvious, but, at present, obscured truth, that 'Construction' and 'Creation' are two distinct processes, or, to speak less figuratively, that 'man must realize that this world is not a storehouse of mechanical power, but a habitation of man's soul with its eternal music of beauty and its light of a divine presence.' As a sequel to this view and immediately flowing from it, we have his answer to the question 'What is Art?' Then follows his conception of Nationality as applicable to India. This naturally rouses us to expect his views on the place of Internationalism in present-day world-polity, and our expectations are not disappointed. In the last speech but one Dr. Tagore proclaims his trust in humanity and his conviction that the meeting of the human races will eventually be translated into the Unity of Man, and, in his final address, he delivers in a clarion voice the message that all possessions and achievements are of no account unless the human soul finds its peace in God.

Dr. Tagore is not only a great poetical force but a moral force. What is more, there is a dualism and something more than a dualism in him : he is not only the Poet Laureate of Asia and a great world personality, but he is the spokesman of India and the living symbol of her culture. Never was a keener desire manifested than at the present day by the West to understand the hoary East, especially India, with her immemorial culture ; and never in her secular history was there greater anxiety on the part of the whole of the East, and even more so in the

case of India, to have her past and her intellectual and moral attainments adequately interpreted to the nations who dwell on the other half of the globe. India and her peoples, therefore, cannot but deem themselves fortunate that, at this juncture, Dr. Tagore imposed upon himself the mission of interpreting the soul of India to the rest of the world, carrying with him the story of her great and magnificent past—her achievements in art, philosophy, and ethics—as his country's gifts to the different parts of the world he has been visiting. In this volume it will not be difficult to detect utterances in which the poet and seer proclaims aloud and with insistence the æsthetic, philosophical, political and moral standards which India stood for in the past and which, he thinks, she ought to stand for, even at the present day, notwithstanding the changes that have since taken place in the political distribution of the globe and in the scientific achievements of some of its peoples.

Speeches delivered at different times, in various countries and places, and at various stages in the growth of the poet's ever-expanding mind, on subjects through which runs a subtle bond of kinship, would inevitably present a certain amount of overlapping and repetition, especially when, as in this case, they are arranged to fit in with a definite scheme and purpose. It is needless to apologize for the exclusion from this selection of such overlapping periods and passages, though a few had unavoidably to remain. Again, it is not difficult to understand how easy it is for a public speaker to disengage himself temporarily from his subject, and to be drawn

into digressions many of which may have only a distant bearing on the matter in hand. Such digressions, if they proceed from the rhythmic and modulated delivery of a Tagore, may have their charm when listened to, but when presented in cold print, lose, like the manna which fed the children of Israel in the wilderness, their savour and power of nutriment on the morrow ; we therefore felt no remorse in deciding upon their omission.

A friend who has seen this selection has written to say that he felt like understanding Dr. Tagore much better after going through the manuscript than after reading volumes on the poet ; if we could be sure that this opinion was not merely a concession to what he considered the demands of courtesy, we should feel highly gratified at having achieved a result which had been our aim and on which we had set our heart.

It remains to record our deep indebtedness to Dr. Tagore for consenting to our making a selection of his lectures and addresses, and for signifying his approval of our choice.

ANTHONY X. SOARES.

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