

ART AND MORALITY
AND
OTHER ESSAYS

F. C. DAVAR

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AND

OTH

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WITH A FOREWORD

By

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To
the sacred memory of
my revered Father
and
to the boundless affection and benignity of
my venerable Mother,
still, happily, the guiding-star and
main inspiration of my life,
this volume is
most respectfully
dedicated.

PREFACE.

We live in an age of interrogation, and before a word of explanation is offered as to what this work is about, it may be questioned why one should be written at all to further encumber this thoroughly book-weary planet. Gibbon thanked his stars at the destruction of the Alexandrian library, while Sir A. Quiller-Couch draws a sigh of relief that scholars should have been spared the infliction of going through all this heap, when knowledge is already multiplying at bewildering speed in modern times. Even Sir C. V. Raman the other day in his Convocation Address at the University of Bombay with a similar grim sense of humour put up a prayer that a few more of our libraries may share the fate of their great predecessor of Alexandria. So increasingly difficult has it become for our reading to keep pace with the rapid composition of books, that at odd moments we cannot help indulging the hope that the world of letters may, for its intellectual sins, be soon submerged by a terrific cataclysm; but, sure enough, even then some literary Jamshid or Manu, some Noah or Deucalion-Pyrrha will still survive to re-populate our bursting book-stalls with ever-growing volumes "thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa."

Malthus was the first to raise an outcry against the evils of over-population of the human species, but this question has now been shifted from the domain of economics to that of science. Whether this evil is really as alarming as it is made out to be, it is certain that murder and suicide, war and incendiarism will appeal

only to the humourists or the unregenerates as the most effective remedy. The danger of over-population is serious in the sense that it leads to starvation, but the case is otherwise with the literary world. To read or not to read depends on the choice of the individual, unless he belongs to that much-maligned order of creation known as the teacher, who has necessarily to keep himself abreast of the intellectual progress of the day, on the top of what he has gathered from the fields of antiquity.

In fact it is monstrous to kill a child when born and unnatural even to suppress the procreative instinct when it runs in well-regulated channels. So too it is vandalism to destroy literature, except when this thankless task is taken up by recognised critics who only are qualified to practise literary infanticide by consigning a book to the limbo of lost existences. It is equally against nature to stifle the literary instinct, for when once it is astir it must seek relief through expression, though the Damocles' sword of oblivion be ever suspended on the writer's head. Some may write for money, with the bayonet of necessity at their backs, for quill-driving is surely a legitimate, though not perhaps a very promising, source of income. "Only a fool," as Dr. Johnson arbitrarily laid it down, "writes for anything but money." Some however write to flatter, others to chastise mankind. Some are so disinterested as to put pen on paper solely with the object of advancing the cause of knowledge; while many fall victims to that last infirmity of noble mind that leads them to scorn delights and live laborious days with a view to embody their ideas in the form of a book.

But under certain conditions there is nothing more natural for a person than to bring out a literary work. What else can a teacher do but invest his fleeting thoughts in a more enduring form, and thereby give to airy nothing the local habitation and the name of a book? It may be unusual for a teacher to score a triple century at cricket or gain a thumping victory on the football field. In great and representative matches "the flannelled fool at the wicket or the muddied oaf at the goal" is seldom a teacher, for with games he is not—at any rate not directly or primarily—concerned. But when a teacher is in constant contact with some of the greatest minds of the world during the best years of his life, he need offer no apology if now and then he is seized with the desire of recording his impressions in print. It is not for him to judge whether his book will render a service to lovers of literature; but it is certain he is thereby rendering a service to himself. The surest way to learn is to teach, said De Quincey; and it may be added that the most effective way for the teacher to test his own knowledge is to commit it to writing. The reason is that writing enables a man to clarify his own ideas and tells him exactly how wide or circumscribed is the range of his knowledge. Here too the teacher or lecturer gains a peculiar advantage over others, for he must make certain things clear to himself before he addresses his students, and satisfy himself about the validity of his arguments before he is out to convince a public audience. Hence it is easier for a teacher than for any one else, sooner or later, to perpetrate the crime of authorship and burden our libraries with a litter of books.

This would serve to explain the genesis of the pages that follow. This book consists of essays on widely different subjects, ranging from Dante and Goethe to Shri Krishna and Firdausi. There is no underlying idea in all of them save this, that though each essay is more or less independent of the other, every one of them is directly or indirectly concerned with literature. Only two of them deal with English literature proper; the majority are connected with the literature of the West, a few with Eastern culture, and the rest are of general literary interest. It must here be admitted that the present writer cannot claim more than an amateurish interest in his studies on Shri Krishna and the Gita, for these subjects lie fairly beyond his province, though certainly not beyond the range of his love and devotion. All the essays, without exception, have appeared in Journals and Memorial Volumes, or have been delivered as lectures under the auspices of various Societies, though they are here presented in a much more amplified form. Horace in the "Ars Poetica" urges the young Piso to keep his composition from the public for nine years, in the hope that the youth may by that time see the wisdom of suppressing the crude results of his juvenile effusions. The present writer has followed the spirit of this advice as best he could and refrained for several years from embodying some of his contributions in the form of a book; but instead of accepting in its entirety the gloomy Horatian admonition he thinks that valour may now be safely considered the better part of discretion, and that an attempt, however unsuccessful, is worth more than sheer passivity, however prudent.

The author is particularly obliged to the editor of the "Sânj Vartamân" for kindly permitting him to reproduce here the majority of these essays that appeared in the special Pateti Numbers of the paper from year to year. He also begs to express his grateful acknowledgments to the Secretaries of the Seventh Indian Oriental Conference held in Baroda in 1933, the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, the Dr. J. J. Modi Memorial Volume Committee, the Principal Anandshankar B. Dhruva Commemoration Volume Committee, as well as to the editors of the Bombay University Journal, the "Prasthân" and the "Kalyân" for a similar favour. But there is one debt in particular which cannot be discharged so formally. It is hard indeed for the writer to adequately express his gratitude to Prof. A. R. Wadia of the Mysore University for having taken the trouble to go through his entire typescripts and for associating his distinguished name with the author's by contributing a generously appreciative Foreword to this work. These few lines from a person of Prof. Wadia's eminence in the sphere of literature and philosophy would certainly go far to enhance the merits, if any, of this production.

AHMEDABAD. }
 Khanpur Road }
 10th June 1935. }

F. C. Davar

Foreword.

I am not sure that Mr. Firoze C. Davar's ART AND MORALITY AND OTHER ESSAYS needs any Foreword from me, but I have acceded to his request as coming from a fellow-worker with almost identical interests. I was already familiar with some of the essays that appear in this volume, but even they had hardly prepared me for the rich feast that I had the privilege of enjoying when he sent me his typescripts. Mr. Davar has a style one may expect of a teacher of English in the premier college of Gujarat, but the varied contents of his essays also show a catholic mind that has ransacked the four corners of the world to glean a rich harvest of poetic thought. I have been equally struck by the moral earnestness of his outlook and his sense of beauty.

The essays fall roughly into three divisions: those dealing with some great poets, those dealing with some literary topics and those dealing with topics of cultural interest. The first class comprises essays on Dante, Goethe, Ibsen and Firdausi. The selection of these poets is interesting, as each of them represents a great epoch and a creation of a new culture. Far from being content with merely presenting a study of these great geniuses, each by himself, he brings to bear on each of them a wealth of comparative literature which adds to the charm of his treatment. He is evidently familiar with the best in three literatures: English, Persian and Gujarati, and commands

a first hand knowledge of the great classics in these languages, and his comparisons culled from a varied storehouse show a breadth of interest and acuteness of illustration that cannot fail to arouse the admiration of the reader. The essay on Dante for example brings out his familiarity with Saraswatichandra of Tripathi, with the work of Sir Mahomed Iqbal, and the achievements of Freud in the sphere of Psychology.

It is interesting to observe that his literary attachments have not in any way dwarfed his moral interest, and this is to be specially seen in his essay on Art and Morality as well as in his treatment of Goethe and Firdausi. The earthly loves of many poets have enriched the world with many beautiful gems, but this does not prevent our author from castigating the great ones for their moral lapses. Firdausi's greatness does not blind him to the sin of avarice he detects in the poet, though personally I feel that Firdausi does not deserve this castigation. Similarly in dealing with Shri Krishna's character he does not stoop to whitewash the episode of the Gopis, but rather takes up a scholarly attitude and seeks to prove on historical grounds that the myth of the Gopis is a later accretion which does not touch the historical greatness of Krishna as a teacher and as a statesman. Mere agreement with conventional judgments is certainly not a trait of Mr. Davar and so one appreciates his independence of thought and honesty of purpose even when they do not fall in with one's own views.

His treatment of general topics always shows a fine perspective and a balance of judgment, almost Greek in

character. The essay on the Romance of the Elgin Marbles is the only one that deals with the topic of art as distinguished from literature and points to his varied interests.

Some of the essays have already seen the light of day e. g. in the Bombay University Journal. Those who enjoyed them will welcome their republication in more permanent form. Others, though written some years ago, are now published for the first time and I am sure they will be enjoyed as much by others as they have been by me. It has been a common reproach cast against Indian graduates that their interests are circumscribed. In the case of Mr. Davar such a reproach would be impertinent, and if his book attracts the attention it deserves it would go to show that the complaint is not so deserved as it has been assumed to be. It is a pleasure to wish the book a safe journey, and the author may certainly count on the consciousness of a work done well and done worthily.

The University,
Mysore, }
16th December 1934. }

A. R. Wadia.

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“ Gharaz naqsheest ke az mâ yâd mânad,
Ke ‘âlam râ nami binam baqâi;
Magar sâhibdili ruzi ba rahmat
Kunad dar haqq e darwishân du‘âi. ”

(Sa‘di).

It is my object to embody my memory in this scrawl, for permanence I see nowhere in the world. It is possible that some pious soul may one day go through it, and in his mercy invoke a blessing on this humble man—the author.