

THE
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grace if it stores two grains instead of one. An elephant on the other hand will have a lot of grass heaped before itself and yet it cannot be charged with having 'great possessions'.

These difficulties appear to have given rise to the current conception of sannyasa (renunciation of the world), which is not accepted by the Ashram. Such sannyasa may be necessary for some rare spirit who has the power of conferring benefits upon the world by only thinking good thoughts in a cave. But the world would be ruined if everyone became a cave-dweller. Ordinary men and women can only cultivate mental detachment. Whoever lives in the world and lives in it only for serving it is a sannyasi.

We of the Ashram hope to become sannyasis in this sense. We may keep necessary things but should be ready to give up everything including our bodies. The loss of nothing whatever should worry us at all. So long as we are alive, we should render such service as we are capable of. It is a good thing if we get food to eat and clothes to wear; it is also a good thing if we don't. We should so train our minds that no Ashramite will fail to give a good account of himself when testing time comes.

VI

BREAD LABOUR

The Ashram holds that every man and woman must work in order to live. This principle came home to me upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays. Referring to the Russian writer Bondareff, Tolstoy observes that his discovery of the vital importance of bread labour is one of the most remarkable discoveries of modern times. The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food, and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind. If this principle is observed everywhere, all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin.

It is possible that this golden rule will never be observed by the whole world. Millions observe it in spite of themselves without understanding it. But their mind is working in a contrary direction, so that they are unhappy themselves and their labour is not as fruitful as it should be. This state of things serves as an incentive to those who understand and seek to practise the rule. By rendering a willing obedience to it they enjoy good health as well as perfect peace and develop their capacity for service.

Tolstoy made a deep impression on my mind, and even in South Africa I began to observe the rule to the best of my ability.

And ever since the Ashram was founded, bread labour has been perhaps its most characteristic feature.

In my opinion the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the *Gita*. I do not go so far as to say that the word *yajna* (sacrifice) there means body labour. But when the *Gita* says that 'rain comes from sacrifice', (verse 14)¹, I think it indicates the necessity of bodily labour. The 'residue of sacrifice' (verse 13)² is the bread that we have won in the sweat of our brow. Labouring enough for one's food has been classed in the *Gita* as a *yajna*. Whoever eats more than is enough for sustaining the body is a thief, for most of us hardly perform labour enough to maintain themselves. I believe that a man has no right to receive anything more than his keep, and that everyone who labours is entitled to a living wage.

This does not rule out the division of labour. The manufacture of everything needed to satisfy essential human wants involves bodily labour, so that labour in all essential occupations counts as bread labour. But as many of us do not perform such labour, they have to take exercise in order to preserve their health. A cultivator working on his farm from day to day has not to take breathing exercise or stretch his muscles. Indeed if he observes the other laws of health, he will never be afflicted with illness.

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if anyone appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution. The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than we need. We may utilize the gifts of nature just as we choose, but in her books the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column.

This law is not invalidated by the fact that men raise bigger crops by mechanizing agriculture and using artificial fertilizers, and similarly increase the industrial output. This only means a transformation of natural energy. Try as we might, the balance is always nil.

Be that as it may, the observance best kept in the Ashram is that of bread labour, and no wonder. Its fulfilment is easy with ordinary care. For certain hours in the day, there is nothing to be done but work. Work is therefore bound to be put in. A worker may be lazy, inefficient or inattentive, but he works for a number of hours all the same. Again certain kinds of labour are capable of yielding an immediate product and the worker cannot idle away

¹ & ² *Vide* Vol. XXXII, p. 160.

a considerable amount of his time. In an institution where body labour plays a prominent part there are few servants. Drawing water, splitting firewood, cleaning and filling lamps with oil, sanitary service, sweeping the roads and houses, washing one's clothes, cooking,—all these tasks must always be performed.

Besides this there are various activities carried on in the Ashram as a result of and in order to help fulfilment of the observances, such as agriculture, dairying, weaving, carpentry, tanning and the like which must be attended to by many members of the Ashram.

All these activities may be deemed sufficient for keeping the observance of bread labour, but another essential feature of *yajna* (sacrifice) is the idea of serving others, and the Ashram will perhaps be found wanting from this latter standpoint. The Ashram ideal is to live to serve. In such an institution there is no room for idleness or shirking duty, and everything should be done with right goodwill. If this were actually the case, the Ashram ministry would be more fruitful than it is. But we are still very far from such a happy condition. Therefore although in a sense every activity in the Ashram is of the nature of *yajna*, it is compulsory for all to spin for at least one hour in the name of God incarnated as the Poor (*Daridranarayana*).

People often say that in an institution like the Ashram where body labour is given pride of place there is no scope for intellectual development, but my experience is just the reverse. Everyone who has been to the Ashram has made intellectual progress as well; I know of none who was the worse on account of a sojourn in the Ashram.

Intellectual development is often supposed to mean a knowledge of facts concerning the universe. I freely admit that such knowledge is not laboriously imparted to the students in the Ashram. But if intellectual progress spells understanding and discrimination, there is adequate provision for it in the Ashram. Where body labour is performed for mere wages, it is possible that the labourer becomes dull and listless. No one tells him how and why things are done; he himself has no curiosity and takes no interest in his work. But such is not the case in the Ashram. Everything including sanitary service must be done intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God. Thus there is scope for intellectual development in all departments of Ashram activity. Everyone is encouraged to acquire full knowledge of his own subject. Anyone who neglects to do this must answer for it. Everyone in the Ashram is a labourer; none is a wage-slave.

It is a gross superstition to imagine that knowledge is acquired only through books. We must discard this error. Reading books has a place in life, but is useful only in its own place. If book-knowledge is cultivated at the cost of body labour, we must raise a revolt against it. Most of our time must be devoted to body labour, and only a little to reading. As in India today the rich and the so-called higher classes despise body labour, it is very necessary to insist on the dignity of labour. Even for real intellectual development one should engage in some useful bodily activity.

It is desirable if at all possible that the Ashram should give the workers some more time for reading. It is also desirable that illiterate Ashramites should have a teacher to help them in their studies. But it appears that time for reading and the like cannot be given at the cost of any of the present activities of the Ashram. Nor can we engage paid teachers, and so long as the Ashram cannot attract more men who are capable of teaching ordinary school subjects, we have to manage with as many such as we have got in our midst. The school and college-educated men who are in the Ashram have not still fully acquired the skill of correlating the three R's with body labour. This is a new experiment for all of us. But we shall learn from experience, and those of us who have received ordinary education will by and by find out ways and means of imparting their knowledge to others.

VII

SWADESHI

At the Ashram we hold that swadeshi is a universal law. A man's first duty is to his neighbour. This does not imply hatred for the foreigner or partiality for the fellow-countryman. Our capacity for service has obvious limits. We can serve even our neighbour with some difficulty. If every one of us duly performed his duty to his neighbour, no one in the world who needed assistance would be left unattended. Therefore one who serves his neighbour serves all the world. As a matter of fact there is in swadeshi no room for distinction between one's own and other people. To serve one's neighbour is to serve the world. Indeed it is the only way open to us of serving the world. One to whom the whole world is as his family should have the power of serving the universe without moving from his place. He can exercise this power only through service rendered to his neighbour. Tolstoy goes further and says that at present we are riding on other people's