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VIJAYA DHARMA SŪRI: HIS LIFE AND WORK

I

INTRODUCTORY

TEACHING OF THE CHRISTIAN PROPHET

To those who are interested only in the passing concerns of the moment, whose sole object of care and study is the accumulation of wealth, or the acquisition of power and authority, rank and renown, who bestow not a single thought upon the perpetual concerns of life, or upon the profound problems of the spiritual existence, which always and ever attract the attention of the highest mind of man, that holy teaching of Jesus Christ: 'Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?', 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,' this holiest of holy teachings may seem to have no meaning, and appear as the teaching of a dreaming enthusiast, an unpractical visionary. To them it seems that the sermon of the Christian Prophet takes no account of the realities of this earthly life and the daily necessities of this world, and has, therefore, no bearing on the conduct of an individual, or that of a community or a nation.

HISTORY AND ITS LESSONS

If, however, we examine this teaching by the light of the lessons which History instils—and History is in such matters our surest and safest guide—if we examine it by the help of those lives which form the soul of all good biographies, we shall find that a nation's greatness, a nation's power, peace and prosperity have resulted from, and have always depended upon, not men of selfish ends and interests, not men who lived contented with earning their own bread and seeking their own happiness, not men who pursued their own pleasures and sought the gratification of their own wants and desires, regarding themselves as the centre of all their thoughts and actions, but those noble and selfless characters who thought less of themselves and more of others, who devoted their talents, their energies and their lives to the service of their country and their people, who loved the land of their birth, the glory and the renown of their race, with so pure an affection that they counted it a joy and an honour beyond price to work and even to suffer for their sake. Take away these characters and their deeds from the pages of History, and see then what remains of History at all? History then becomes a perfect blank. It has little to tell; still less to teach. And, if countries that have become great and prosperous owe their greatness and their prosperity to the self-denying labours of the men who lived and worked

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for them, who used their reason and their capacities for the elevation and regeneration of mankind in general and their own people in particular, is not theirs the character which ought to be built and developed by every man in himself? is not theirs the example which ought to enliven his spirit and illuminate his soul? is not theirs the life and career which ought to animate his ambitions and aspirations, rouse his energies and emotions?

MEN WE WANT AND WORSHIP

These are the lives we admire and esteem; these are the lives we revere and worship. These are the men we love and require; not men who are selfish triflers, interested calculators who think only of personal gain and personal loss. We want men whose first question is 'what good can I *do*?' and not 'what good can I *gain*?' We want men who are self-denying and self-sacrificing,—men worthy to be called men and hence worthy of our respect. We want men who will be constantly watching for an opportunity to serve their fellow-men, and are ready to trample under their feet their selfishness, their own personal interests, when they come in conflict with the general good. We want men who will regard every contact with another man as an opportunity of being useful to him in some way or other, and are prepared to put aside all puerile questions of race, caste and creed, as they put away a soiled cloth, or a worn-out garment, for the enlightenment and happiness of mankind.

We want men who will labour not only for the present generation, but also for the next and the succeeding ones ; men who, seeing the miserable state of the religious world,—seeing the noble and sacred faiths debased, the old and solemn rites and observances ridiculed and derided, the temples, the churches, the mosques, and the holy shrines thronged by hypocrites and mockers—burn with a desire to rekindle the fires of morality and spirituality upon the defiled and polluted altars, and bring back the knowledge and the wisdom of the ancient *Gurus* and *Rishis* within the reach of a sin-burdened world. The lives of such men will be a constant source of inspiration to those who are in the ditch of darkness, ever struggling against the storms of life, sometimes discouraged, sometimes disheartened over seeming failures, and even at times ready to give up the battle. The records of such careers will beckon the fallen to awake, to arise and forge forward in the fight of life, and will inspire both the young and the old to transmute their very failures into success.

LIFE, ITS END AND OBJECT

Life, it has been truly observed, is Duty, and it seems that all worldly wisdom of the highest character is summed up by the poet in his two expressive lines

‘I slept and dreamt that life was Beauty—
I woke and found that life was Duty.’

Life is, indeed, Duty, which means doing. There is a high purpose in it—something serious about it. It

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is not given to man that it may be wasted, or that it may be frittered away or trifled with. It is to manifest in full glory and activity the Power, the Wisdom and the Love that are its birthright. It is to become perfect, as perfect as the 'Father in Heaven is Perfect.' Herein lies the true and rational solution of the great problem of life, one in which Science and Religion and Philosophy find their proper place and function, and are all welded together into one harmonious and magnificent whole.

THE LAW OF SELF-SACRIFICE THE LAW OF DEVELOPMENT FOR MAN

But, in order to reach this highest state, the state of perfection, the craving of selfishness should be first destroyed. Everything that is selfish, everything that is personal, everything that is of the lower nature must be burnt up before the goal is reached and attained. Hard, hard it is for man to get rid of selfishness; for, in doing so, he has to conquer a habit which he took years and ages in forming. This personal element of selfishness had its use and its place in those earlier stages; as one of the Masters of Wisdom once put it: 'The law of the survival of the fittest is the law of evolution for the brute; but the law of intelligent self-sacrifice is the law of development for man.' So it comes that man needs to transcend what was formerly his own nature and to build into himself the excellent virtue of unselfishness, in order that he may learn to sacrifice what seems his

personal interest for the good of humanity as a whole. A man whose conception of life is high realizes the value of this lesson in its entirety. He realizes that life is given to him that he may do something that will endure; and nothing endures so much as a good deed done for the public good. He lives that others may live. He regards himself as one to whom life has been given that he may serve others and make them happy. He realizes that he is born, not for himself solely, but for others—not only for his family, but also for his country. And, realizing this his real duty in life, he discharges it with courage and self-reliance, serving humanity, without expecting others to do that service for himself. Such a career, indeed, becomes a vast subject of reflection. Such is the career of Vijaya Dharma Sūri, whose life and work it is the object of these pages to describe.

II

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE ANCIENT ORDER OF MONKS

THE *Āchārya* whose life it is here proposed to sketch belongs to the most ancient and sacred Order of Monks, whose bond of union is not the acceptance or profession of a common belief, but a common search and a common aspiration for Truth—Truth which forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. He belongs to those monks who regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority; who maintain that Truth should be sought by study and reflection, by contemplation and meditation, by purity of life and conduct, by consecration and devotion to high ideals; who hold that religious belief should be the result of individual study or intuition, and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion; who illuminate the scriptures, and explain and elucidate the doctrines and tenets of religions, by unveiling their hidden meanings, thus justifying them at the bar of intellectual criticism, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition; who consider every religion as an expression of the Ancient Wisdom, and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism; who extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privi-

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lege to bestow, but as a duty to perform, ever seeking to remove ignorance, not to punish it ; who endeavour to restore to the world the Science of the Spirit, asking man to realize the Self, the true Self, the God within, teaching him to know the Spirit, the *Ātman*, as himself, and the mind and body as his servants.

THEIR BENEFICENT WORK FOR HUMANITY

These are the monks, who have been continuously carrying on their beneficent work for humanity, pouring down from their lofty heights freely and abundantly high and noble ideals, sublime and inspiring thoughts, pure and devotional aspirations, streams of intellectual and spiritual help for mankind. These are the self-denying, selfless souls, who have completely and unconditionally dedicated themselves to the service of humanity, bending all the sublime powers that they hold to the quickening of the evolution of the human race. With all the mighty forces at their command, they devote themselves freely and fully to the cultivation of spiritual knowledge, spiritual wisdom and spiritual aspiration, weaning people from their sole and supreme devotion to the objects of the senses, pointing out to them the path of spiritual progress, which will necessarily render them less likely to sacrifice the higher dictates of humanity on the altars of their individual earthly interests, guiding them into those paths of purity and holiness, which will ultimately lead them to the vast ocean of spiritual consciousness, wherein alone can be found pure

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life, pure thought and pure joy,—the true *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* of existence.

GREAT SERVICES RENDERED BY VIJAYA DHARMA SŪRI

Futile, indeed, it would be to enumerate the great services, which Vijaya Dharma Sūri, the distinguished Monk, has rendered to humanity in general, and his own people in particular. His extraordinary activity, eloquence and power of persuasion, which have resulted in the creation of a number of educational and philanthropical institutions, such as schools, printing-presses, libraries, hospitals and *āshramas*; his learning, scholarship and sound erudition, which have resulted in the issuing of journals and periodicals, in the publication of an important part of the Jain literature which had hitherto remained ignored, and in the dissemination of a correct knowledge of the principles and tenets of the Jain religion; his interest in the productions of the ancient Jain civilization, such as stone inscriptions and manuscripts—the relics of a glorious past—which the apathy and ignorance of the people had allowed to decay and rot in neglect, and his efforts to preserve and divulge the same; his crusade against the killing of animals, and his battles so earnestly fought in favour of righteousness and renunciation; his self-devotion and self-sacrifice in the interest of all that is good and virtuous; his tolerance of, and broad sympathy with, men of all castes and creeds, and his unbounded selfless love for humanity—all these explain the cause of his world-

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wide fame, all these have combined to make him the most noteworthy figure of the present day.

INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL GREATNESS

Much more might be said in marking general and popular features. Mental characteristics might be traced in his eager, ardent and sympathetic ear, in his kind, tender and expressive eye, his sweet, marvellous and melodious voice, his keen intellect, his penetrating insight, his presence the embodiment of stateliness and dignity. We pass over in silence his inner life of religion ; we pass over in silence his quiet deeds of reclamation and philanthropy. Observe, however, that it is not the qualities or attributes enumerated here, singly or in combination, that have ennobled Vijaya Dharma Sūri, and enthroned him in his citadel of human hearts. His is less an intellectual than a moral greatness and power. What men admire, adore and revere is *himself*—the great and singular and wonderful personality : a scholar of academic refinement in sympathy with the people and their needs ; a monk combining in himself the strictest observance of the monastic vows with a liberal interpretation of the spirit of his religion ; a sage of clear and far extending vision, at once patient, prompt and enthusiastic ; in character lofty, yet humble and unassuming ; of disciplined self-control combined with energy and earnestness ; of a strength of will that has never quailed before mind or multitude, accumulated wealth or regal power and pomp, that has never failed in the darker