LETTERS FROM RUSSIA

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

VISVA-BHARATI
2, BANIM CHATTERJEE STREET
CALCUTTA
Translated by
Dr. Sasadhar Sinha

September 1960

© Visva-Bharati 1960

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece  Tagore in Russia
1  Among students of the Pioneer Commune.
2  Discussions with Pioneers.
3  A Russian artist presenting Tagore a painting at the exhibition of the poet's drawings.
4  Among peasants at the Central Peasants' House, Moscow.
5  Reception at the Pioneer Commune.
6  Tagore arriving at the exhibition of his paintings at Moscow.
In Russia at last! Whichever way I look, I am filled with wonder. It is unlike any other country. It is radically different. From top to bottom they are rousing everybody up without distinction.

Throughout the ages, civilised communities have contained groups of nameless people. They are the majority—the beasts of burden, who have no time to become men. They grow up on the leavings of society’s wealth, with the least food, least clothes and least education, and they serve the rest. They toil most, yet theirs is the largest measure of indignity. At the least excuse they starve and are humiliated by their superiors. They are deprived of everything that makes life worth living. They are like a lampstand bearing the lamp of civilisation on their heads: people above receive light while they are smeared with the trickling oil.

I had often thought about them, but came to the conclusion that there was no help for them. If there were no one below, how could there be anyone above, and it is necessary to be there above. If there is nobody at the top, it is
impossible to see anything beyond one's immediate ken; mere animal existence can never be man's destiny. His civilisation consists in going beyond bare subsistence. The most cherished fruits of civilisation have flourished on the field of leisure. There is need to preserve a corner for leisure in human civilisation. So I used to think that the utmost should be done to improve the education, health and comfort of those who are compelled to labour at the bottom of society not merely through circumstances, but by reason of their body and mind.

But the trouble is that nothing permanent can be built up on charity; to try to do good from without is vitiated at every step. Only by becoming equal can one render real help. In any case I have not been able to think it all out satisfactorily, but to think that it is inevitable that the progress of civilisation could be maintained only by keeping down the bulk of humanity and denying it its human rights is a reproach to the human mind. The same truth applies within the sphere of each individual social unit.

Consider how foodless India has been feeding England. Many English people think it natural that India's fulfilment should lie in eternally nourishing England. It is not wrong to keep a nation for ever in slavery in order that England may become great and do great things for mankind. What does it matter if this nation eats little, wears little—but even so, those others sometimes out of sheer pity help us in slightly improving our condition. But a hundred years have gone by, and we have had neither education nor health, nor wealth.

Man cannot do good to those whom he does not respect. At any rate, no sooner is one's self-interest at stake than a clash ensues. A radical solution of this problem is being sought in Russia. It is not time yet to consider the final fruit of this attempt, but for the present whatever catches my eye strikes me with amazement. The royal road to the solution of all our problems is education. The bulk of human society has so far been deprived of full opportunities for education: India well-nigh completely so. It is astonishing to watch the extraordinary vigour with which education spreads throughout Russian society. The measure of education is not merely in numbers, but in its thoroughness; its intensity. What abundant preparation, what tremendous effort, so that no one should remain helpless or idle! Not in European Russia alone, but also among the semi-civilised races of Central Asia, they have opened the flood-gates of education. Unending effort is being made to bring the latest fruits of science to them. The theatres here are crowded, but those who come to them are peasants and workers. Nowhere are they humiliated. In the few institutions I have visited so far, I have
seen the awakening of their spirit and the joy of their self-respect. Let alone our masses, their difference even with the working classes of England is colossal. What we ourselves have been attempting to do at Sriniketan, they are doing on a superior scale all over the land. How splendid it would be if our workers could come here for training! Every day I compare conditions here with India: what is and what might have been! Harry Timbre, my American friend, is studying the health organisation of this country—its excellence is astonishing, but where stands diseased, hungry, hapless and helpless India? A few years ago the condition of the masses here was fully comparable with that of the Indian masses: things have rapidly changed in this short period, whereas we are up to the neck in the mud of stagnation.

I do not say that all is perfect here: there are grave defects. For this reason they will have trouble some day. Briefly the defect is that they have turned their system of education into a mould, but humanity cast in a mould cannot endure. If the theory of education does not correspond with the law of the living mind, either the mould will burst into pieces or man's mind will be paralysed to death or man will be turned into a mechanical doll.

I notice that boys here have been divided into groups and given charge of different departments; in connection with their dormitories they unders...
Moscow
19 September, 1930

PLACE—Russia: Scene—A palace in the suburb of Moscow.—Through the window I can see the woodland stretching to the horizon: waves of green break in on all sides—deep and light green, green tinged with mauve, and yellow tinted green. In the far distance, on the outskirt of the wood, stands the row of cottages of the hamlet. It is nearly ten o’clock: masses of clouds have gathered in the sky; the keen rainless air is vibrant; the tops of the straight poplars sway in the wind.

The hotel where I stayed in Moscow is called the Grand Hotel. It is a huge structure, but in poor condition. It is as though the scion of a wealthy family had gone bankrupt. Of the old-time appointments, some are soiled, some torn and dirty, with no means of patching, and show no sign of being acquainted with the laundryman. The whole city wears the same appearance but even through this utter lack of tidiness one catches a glimpse of past splendour: it is as though gold buttons were worn on a torn dress shirt or as though Dacca muslin were darned. Nowhere in Europe does one come across such universal bareness in the amenities of life. It is chiefly because of the difference between the rich and the poor elsewhere that the picture of concentrated wealth strikes the eye so forcibly; there the poverty is in the background, hidden behind the drop curtain: behind the scenes everything is topsy-turvy, filthy and unhealthy, dense with the darkness of sorrow, misery and evil deeds. But to us outsiders, looking through the window of the shelter we obtain, everything appears proper, elegant and everybody well-fed. Were it possible to distribute this wealth equally, it would at once be obvious that it is really not large enough to suffice for all. It is because the distinction of wealth is non-existent here that the visage of wealth has changed; there is not the unseemliness of poverty, there is mere want. It is because nowhere else we meet with such widespread destitution that at first sight it is so striking. Those who are called the masses in other countries are here the only people.

All sorts of people are walking along the streets of Moscow. Nobody is well dressed: one knows at once that the leisureed class has disappeared altogether; everybody has to earn his own living by his own hands: the refinements of luxury are nowhere in evidence. I had to call on a high official, Dr. Petrov, in his office in a building which once belonged to an old aristocrat, but the office itself has little furniture and no
sign of neatness. It has the bare, unkempt and unwashed appearance of a house in our country at the time of mourning when all social obligations are in abeyance. The arrangement for food and comfort at the place where I am staying is highly inappropriate for a place called the Grand Hotel, but no one bothers because everyone is in the same state.

I remember my childhood. How humble was the mode of life in those days and how simple its paraphernalia compared with modern ways, but there was not the least feeling of embarrassment in our minds on this account; for at that time there was no sharp difference in the standard of life: it was roughly the same in every household. What difference there was lay in general culture, in the cultivation of art and music, in the difference of family traditions, in the distinction of speech, manners and customs.

The pride arising from the difference of wealth has come to our country from the West. When money began to flow into the houses of office-goers and businessmen, articles of foreign luxury became the measure of respectability. Thus, today, even in our country, the distinction of wealth attracts attention rather than family traditions and conduct, culture and intellectual attainments. Pride in wealth is the greatest sign of man's indignity; we must beware that this meanness does not reach our inmost social being.

What has pleased me most here is the complete disappearance of the vulgar conceit of wealth. For this reason alone the self-respect of the people has been restored; peasants and workers have all shaken off the load of disrespect and raised their head. How wonderfully easy has become man's relation with his fellows.
III

Moscow
25 September, 1930

I am now in Russia; had I not come, my life's pilgrimage would have remained incomplete. Before it is time to assess good and evil in their activities here, the first thing that occurs to me is: what incredible courage! What is called traditional clings to man in a thousand different ways: its numerous apartments, its innumerable doors are guarded by sentries whose number is legion; its treasury rises mountain-high, filled with taxes gathered over centuries! They have torn it up by its roots here: there is no fear, no hesitation in their minds. The seat of the ancient has been swept away to make room for the new. In my mind I marvel at the West when I see her achieving the difficult by the magic of Science. But what has astonished me most is the tremendous task that is being carried out here. Had it been merely a colossal destruction I would not have been so greatly surprised, because they can cause enough trouble if they want to, but I can see that they are determined to raise a new world. They have no time to lose, because the whole world is their opponent; they must prove without delay that what they want is not wrong, that it is no fraud; a decade or two is determined to prevail against a millenium. Very small is their material strength, but the daring of their will power defies comparison.

This revolution was waiting to take place in Russia for a long time. Preparations have long been in progress; countless numbers of men, known and unknown, have given their lives for it, and embraced intolerable suffering. The cause for revolution is wide-spread, but it becomes concentrated in certain parts of the world: the skin reddens and breaks into boils in the weaker spots, even though the blood of the whole body is infected. It was in Russia that the destitute and the helpless endured untold hardships at the hands of the rich and the powerful. Hence it is in Russia that this extreme inequality between the two parties has sought a radical solution.

Once upon a time the French Revolution was caused by the pressure of this inequality. The oppressed realised that the humiliation and misery of inequality were universal. Thus it was during that revolution that the message of liberty, equality and fraternity was carried across the frontiers of France. But it did not endure. Here also the revolutionary appeal is universal. In the world of today, the people of this country at any rate are thinking of the interests of the whole of humanity, transcending all national.
real power and relying on Fate they endured everything. To-day even in their utter helplessness people conjure up the Kingdom of Heaven where oppression disappears and humiliation is no more. For this very reason oppressed humanity is in revolt everywhere.

The mighty are insolent. They are trying to check from outside the urge for power among the oppressed which makes them restless: the messengers of the new spirit are being barred out and stifled in silence. But what they should really fear is the suffering of the oppressed which they always despise. They are not afraid to heap misery upon the sufferers for the sake of profit: their hearts do not tremble at enjoying profits of 200 to 300 per cent by driving the peasants into the maws of famine. This is because to them profit is strength. But in human society danger lurks in all extremes and it can never be stayed from without. Inordinate power cannot thrive against utter helplessness: had not the mighty been intoxicated with their own power, what they would fear most is the exaggeration of inequality, because all disharmony is opposed to the law of the universe.

Even when the invitation came to me from Moscow I had no clear idea about the Soviet régime. I have continually heard contradictory statements about them. I had my doubts about them because in the beginning their path was the path

interests. Whether this will be permanent, no one can tell. But the national problem of to-day is part of the world problem: this truth is implicit in the modern age; one must accept it.

The curtain has gone up on the stage of world history in this age. It is as though all this time rehearsals had been taking place in the background, fragmentarily, in different chambers. Each country was hedged in all round. Intercourse from outside was not altogether impossible, but the image that we saw of humanity in division exists no longer. Then we saw separate trees, but now it is a forest. If to-day there is a loss of balance in human society, it is evident from end to end of the world.

When I asked the Korean youth in Tokyo what his grievance was, he replied: "The grip of capitalist domination is upon us: we are the means of its profit." Whereupon I questioned: "Whatever the cause, you are weak: how will you rid yourselves of the burden?" He said: "The helpless inherit the earth to-day; suffering will be their bond of union! The wealthy and the powerful will ever guard their thrones and treasures, but will never be able to unite. Korea's strength lies in her suffering."

The important thing is that to-day suffering humanity has a nobler vision of itself on the world stage than before, for in the past they saw themselves in isolation, they were unaware of their
of violence. But I noticed that Europe had begun to relent. I was encouraged by people to go when they heard that I was thinking of visiting Russia. Even Englishmen praised the Soviet Government. Many said that they were engaged on a wonderful experiment.

Many however discouraged me, but the main cause of their fear was the lack of comfort. They said that food and other necessities were so coarse that I could not endure them. Still others said that what they would show me would be mainly window-dressing. One must admit that to come to visit Russia at my age and in my present state of health was a rash undertaking. But since I had received the invitation, it would have been unpardonable not to see the light of the mightiest sacrificial fire that has been lit in the world's history.

Besides, what the Korcan youth had said to me was ringing in my ears. The thought in my mind was: to-day at the very threshold of the rich invincible Western civilisation Russia has raised the seat of power for the dispossessed, completely ignoring the angry scowl of the West. Who will go and see this, if I do not? If their aim is to overthrow the power of the powerful and the wealth of the wealthy, why should I fear, why should I be angry? How much is our power, how much our wealth? We belong to the band of the hungry and helpless of the world.

If it is true that they are resolved to rouse the spirit of the weak, how can we say we must shun their company? They may make mistakes, but there is no knowing whether their adversaries may not do the same. But the time is come for us to proclaim that there is no salvation for man if the power of the weak is not awakened at once, because the weapon of the powerful has exceeded its limits: so long it was of the earth only, but to-day it has polluted even the heavens; the helplessness of the weak knows no bounds to-day: all opportunities and advantages are heaped on one side of human society while helplessness reigns supreme on the other.

The report of the atrocities at Dacca has been agitating my mind for some time. What inhuman cruelty, and yet nothing is said about it in English newspapers. If somebody is killed in England by a motor accident they flash the news to every corner of the land but the life and honour of our helpless people have become incredibly valueless. Those who are held so cheap can never obtain justice.

Our grievance cannot reach the ears of the world: all approach to them is closed. And yet all possible means for spreading calumny against us are in the hands of others! Nowadays this is also a source of the greatest humiliation to the weaker peoples because to-day rumours go round the whole world; the powerful nations who con-
trol the instruments of propaganda are able to crush the races devoid of power behind the smoke-screen of infamy and disgrace. It is proclaimed to the people of the world that Hindus and Mussulmans cut one another’s throats and therefore... but once upon a time even in Europe different communities were engaged in murderous strifes which have now turned to desolating wars between different European countries. They have taken the colossal form of international communal riots, displaying the primitive mind of suicidal stupidity, before which our petty barbarism must bow its head in awe, for our unintelligent shortsightedness is based only upon a travesty of education which belongs to five per cent of the population.

To try to prove that contempt is our desert, instead of trying to remove its cause, is the heaviest penalty we pay for our weakness. In our country, the road to an adequate education is closed because law and order leaves no room for any other benefit: the till is completely empty. To me of all national services one only is significant—all my life I have devoted my whole energy to educate the people to self-reliance. Towards this end I have never wished to decline co-operation from the authorities, nay, I have even expected it, but you well know with what success. I have realised that it is not to be. Great is our sin: we are weak.

Thus when I heard that beginning from almost nothing, popular education had made enormous strides in Russia, I decided to go there, and if my frail body does break, what matter! They have realised that education alone can give strength to the weak: food, health and peace all depend upon it. Law and order may be a great boon but never when they thrive upon destitution that starves our body and kills our mind.

Having grown up in the modern Indian atmosphere, I had been firmly convinced that it was well-nigh impossible to educate our 330 million people: nothing but our ill fate was to blame for it. When I heard that education was making rapid progress among the workers and peasants here in Russia, I thought this was a mere smattering of the three R’s: the counting of the heads was its only glory. Even that is no small matter. If this happened in our country we should bless our fate and be satisfied. But I have seen that here education is meant to build up man’s character, quite unlike the passing of the M.A. examination by cramming lecture notes!

Later I shall write about this in greater detail; to-day there is no time. I set out for Berlin to-night. On October 3, I start on the journey across the Atlantic: for how long I cannot yet definitely say.

I dare not miss this opportunity, although body and mind refuse to respond to it. If I succeed
in gleaning anything from this visit I shall have peace for the rest of my days. It would not be a bad plan for our educational centre to exhaust our capital for the sake of even short-lived perfection and then blow out the lamp before finally bidding good-bye: to leave a few loose ends would be to spoil the whole thing. When his means are meagre man's inner weakness becomes more and more apparent and the more there is of negligence, wrangling, and mutual calumny. Tolerance depends to some extent on affluence, but wherever true success has shown itself we find that it is not a commodity to be purchased with money—its golden harvest is raised on the soil of poverty. I would have been satisfied if I had possessed even a small measure of the tireless energy, courage, intelligence and self-sacrifice shown here in the educational organisation. The less there is of inner strength and genuine enthusiasm the greater the need for money.

On my arrival in Berlin I received two of your letters together: letters of the heavy rains: it is unnecessary to tell you how my mind grows wistful when I think of the clouds in the skies of Santiniketan casting shadows over the śāl forest: of the gathering gloom, of the heavy downpour of Śrāvaṇ.

But having come back from Russia now, the picture of that beauty has been obliterated from my mind. I can only think of the countrywide misery of our peasantry. From my earliest youth I have intimately known the Bengal villages. I met the peasants daily and listened to their grievances. I know of few creatures more helpless than they: the light of knowledge does not reach the depths of the society where they live: the breath of life hardly blows there.

None of those who dominated the political arena of our country in those days felt that the villagers belonged to this country. I remember telling a leading politician of that time at the Pabna Conference that if our political progress was to be real, the underdogs of our society must be helped to become men. He dismissed this with
such utter contempt that I clearly realised that our patriots had picked up their lesson of patriotism from an imperfect study of foreign history; they felt no sympathy for their own people who belong to the basement of society. One of the advantages of such a mentality is that it finds it easy to wall over foreign rule, to get heated about it, to write poems about it and to run newspapers. But the moment one recognises the vast multitude of his countrymen as his own people, in spite of their apparent insignificance, he must admit responsibility and the real work begins.

Since that day much water has flowed under the bridges. How often since have I heard the echo—and not only the echo—of what I then said. Even money has been collected for the welfare of the villages, but only to eddy and disappear round the lofty peaks on which our politicians had built their platform of publicity: nothing reached the low land of our society in which the village lies.

Once upon a time I moored my boat to the sandbanks of the Padma to devote myself to literature. I had thought that I would dig the mine of ideas with my pen: this was my only vocation: I was incompetent to do anything else. But when I failed to persuade people that our field for self-government was in the peasant-villages, and that its exercise must begin at once, I had to lay aside my pen and say: Very well, let me undertake this task myself. The only person who came forward to support me in my resolution was Kalimohan. His body was wasted by disease; he had a temperature twice a day and above all his name was in the police books.

Our history still continues its rough and difficult course, having little to fall back upon. My object was to strengthen the peasant in self-reliance. In this connection two thoughts revolved in my mind: first, that the right to the land does not morally belong to the landlord, but to the peasant; secondly, agriculture will never improve unless land can be collectively cultivated by cooperative methods. The attempt to raise crops on strips of land, separated by ridges, by means of time-honoured ploughs is as good as trying to fill a bottomless pit.

But both of these ideals are difficult to attain. In the first place, no sooner is the right to the land given to the peasant than it immediately passes under the control of the money-lender: hence the burden of his suffering must increase instead of decreasing. At one time I called the peasants together to discuss the question of combining agricultural land. From the verandah of the house where I lived in Silaidah one sees nothing but field upon field stretching out beyond the horizon. From early dawn one peasant after another comes with his plough and cattle, ploughs round and round his tiny plot and departs. How
great is the waste of divided effort! And I have seen it daily with my own eyes! When I explained to the peasants the advantages of joining their lands together and tilling them by machine plough, they readily agreed. But we are ignorant, they said, how can we possibly do such a big thing? If I then could have said: I will take the responsibility upon myself,—the matter would have ended there. But how could I? It was impossible for me to undertake the responsibility for this task: I had neither the education nor the strength.

But this was always in my mind. When we had our co-operative organisation at Bolpur under the management of the Visvabharati, I thought the opportunity had at last come. Those who are in charge of the office are young and have far more practical sense and education than I, but our young men are academic and given to cramming. The education in vogue in our country kills initiative and ability for work: the salvation of the student depends on his repeating the text-books.

Apart from this shallowness of mind, there is another danger. There exists the division of classes into those who have memorised their lessons at school and those who have not, that is, into the lettered and the unlettered. The sympathies of our academic mind cannot go beyond the lessons of the book-learners. Through the curtain of book-leaves our eye-sight fails to reach those whom we are wont to call the cultivating classes: to us they are indistinct. That is why they are usually left out of account in all our efforts. That is why also when in other countries constructive work is going on in the lower layers of society through co-operation, with us nothing is done beyond doling out loans of money. Because money-lending, working out interest on it and realising the loans are not difficult, indeed easy even for timid minds: it involves no risk if there is no error in multiplication.

It is because of this lack of intellectual courage and want of sympathy for the masses that it is so hard to remove the suffering of the distressed in our country. But for this no one is to blame, because once upon a time with the advent of the reign of commerce schools were opened in our country to turn out clerks as out of factories. Our highest bliss lies in final absorption with our masters in desk-dom. So it is that our education comes to naught when our expectations of an appointment are baffled. Thus indeed has our national service ended in plaintive outbursts by our educated community on the platform of the Congress and in newspaper articles. Tied to the pen our hands could be of no service in the shaping of our country's destiny.

I, too, have grown up in the same atmosphere; hence I had not the courage to think boldly that
it was possible to move the crushing rock of ignorance and weakness from the breast of our teeming millions. I always have wondered whether something could not be done. I believed that there was in society a layer which was walled up on all sides and for all time: where sunlight would never penetrate; we must therefore bestir ourselves at least to light an oil-lamp there. But ordinarily even that much sense of duty is wanting in us to shake people vigorously out of their complacency, because it never occurs to us clearly that it is possible to do anything for those whom we cannot see in the darkness.

With such faint courage, indeed, I came to Russia; I had heard that the spread of education had made great advance among the peasants and workers. I took this to mean that they had made more progress than we had done in teaching the first primer, or at any rate the second primer, in their village schools. I expected nothing more than to see from statistics the number of peasants who could sign their names or knew their multiplication table up to ten.

Remember that the revolution which brought the Tsarist rule to an end took place only in 1917, that is, only thirteen years ago. Meanwhile they have had to fight against violent opposition both at home and abroad. They are alone, having to shoulder the burden of a ramshackle political system. The accumulated refuse of former mis-

rule obstructs their path. The storm of civil war which they had to cross to reach the shores of the new age was fanned into fury by the secret and open help of England and America. Their resources are small: they have no credit with foreign merchants. Not having enough industries at home they are powerless as producers of wealth. Hence they must live through their period of probation by selling their own food. At the same time the wastage of keeping in full trim the most unproductive part of the political machine, namely, the army, is indispensable to them, because all the capitalist powers of to-day are their enemies and their armouries are full to overflowing.

I remember how the Soviets by their disarmament proposals startled the nations who professed love of peace. Because the Soviets do not aim at increasing power that is exclusively national—their task is to fulfil an ideal by building up as efficiently and widely as possible the education and health, the means and substance of the livelihood of the masses—their utmost need is undisturbed peace. But you well know that the strong men of the League of Nations do not really want to stop their far-reaching acts of depredation, however much they may shout for peace. Hence it is that in the imperialist countries the sowing of the thistles of armament outruns the sowing of grain. Meanwhile a devastating famine had raged in Russia for some
time: nobody knows how many people died. Having overcome it they have had only eight years in which to engage in the task of ushering in the new age, notwithstanding their lack of external resources.

It was no easy task—their political dominion spreads over Europe and Asia. Even India does not contain as many races as they have. The contrasts of geographical and human characters are far greater among them than with us. Indeed, theirs is a complex problem of many different races, a miniature of the world problem complicated by a diversity of conditions.

I have already told you how from outside Moscow appears much less clean than the other European capitals. None of those hurrying along the streets look smart: the whole city wears its work-a-day clothes. In work-a-day clothes there is no class distinction: it exists only in the Sunday best. Here everybody is similarly dressed. The whole place belongs to the workers—you see them wherever you look. Here one does not have to go to libraries to read books or to villages or working class districts to take down notes about the change that has come upon the workers and peasants. The question is: where are those whom we call gentlemen?

Here the masses have not in the least been put in the shade by the gentlemen: those who lived in the background for ages have come forward in the open to-day. It did not take long to discover that they have not only learnt to recognise printed letters by reading infat readers: they have become men in these years.

I thought of the peasants and workers in my own country. It all seemed like the work of the Genii in the Arabian Nights. Only a decade ago they were as illiterate, helpless and hungry as our own masses: equally blindly superstitious, equally stupidly religious. In their misery and trouble they knocked their heads against the door of their God; in fear of the other world their mind was held in bondage by the priests, and in fear of this world by the king, merchants and landlords: their task was to clean the boots of those who kicked them with those very boots. Their customs had not changed for a thousand years: their carts, spinning wheels and oil presses belonged to their grandfathers' times: any suggestion of change would provoke them to revolt. The ghost of Time sits on the back of our three hundred million and blindfolds them from behind: with them too it was the same. Who could be more astonished than an unfortunate Indian like myself to see how they had removed the mountain of ignorance and helplessness in these few years? And yet when this change was taking place, they had not the much vaunted law and order of our country.

I have already said that I had not to go far-
to see the picture of their popular education, nor
to examine their spelling as our school-inspectors
do. One evening I went to visit the Central
Peasants' House in Moscow, where they can live
inexpensively for a few days when they come to
town. I had a talk with them. When such talks
are possible with our peasants, I shall be able to
answer the Simon Commission.

It is only this: I have clearly seen what might
have been done, but it has not been done; never-
theless, we do have our law and order! The evil
repute about communal riots in our country is
widely propagated; like this recent complication
of ours, here too ugly and savage riots used to
take place between Jews and Christians, but they
have completely been eradicated by education
and administration. I have often thought since
coming here that before going out to India, the
Simon Commission should have visited Russia.

If you think of the agitation in my mind
about conditions at home, you will realise why,
instead of writing a gentlemanly letter to a gentle-
woman like you, I am writing like this; once
before, after the Jallianwala Bagh affair, I expe-
rrienced similar mental unrest. I feel the same
unhappiness again after the trouble at Dacca.
That incident was officially white-washed but we
know the value of such explanations. If this had
happened in Soviet Russia no white-washing would
have succeeded in concealing such disgraceful acts.

V

BERLIN

1 October, 1930

In a long letter to you from Moscow I gave my
impressions of Russia. If it reaches you, you will
have some information about that country.

I have given an account of some of the things
that are being done there for the improvement of
the peasantry. When I came to be acquainted
with the class of people who in our country are
dumb and ignorant and deprived of all life's
opportunities, whose minds are crushed under
the weight of inner and outer poverty, I realised
how much of man's wealth of mind is obliterated
by social indifference. What infinite waste: what
cruel injustice!

When I visited the Peasants' House in Moscow,
I found that it is like a club. Such institutions
can be found all over Russia, in towns, big and
small, and in villages. In these places, arrange-
ments are made for holding talks on agriculture,
sociology and the like, for teaching the illiterate
to read and write, and for instructing the peasants
in scientific methods of agriculture in special
classes. To all these Houses are attached museums
of natural, sociological and all kinds of objects.
of educational interest; there the peasants can obtain useful advice on their various needs.

When the peasants are in town on business, they are allowed to stay in these houses for three weeks at a time on very moderate terms. By means of this extensive organisation the Soviet authorities have laid the broadest foundation for infusing life into the whole of society by awakening the mind of the hitherto illiterate peasantry.

On entering the house, I found some people eating in the dining hall, while others were busy reading newspapers. I was shown into a room upstairs where everybody assembled. These people hailed from different parts of the country, some from very distant provinces. They were all quite easy in manner and showed no hesitation whatsoever. When the superintendent of the Home had welcomed me and introduced me, I said something in reply. Then they began to ask me questions.

One of them asked me why in India Hindus and Musulmans quarrel.

I answered: "When I was young I never saw such brutalities as are perpetrated to-day. In those days, in villages and towns there was no lack of good will between the two communities. They attended their mutual festivals and shared their daily joys and sorrows. This ugly affair has come about since the political movement began in our country. But whatever the immediate cause of such inhuman conduct among neighbours, its root cause is the absence of education among the masses. It has not yet been possible to introduce that amount of education which could remove this mischief. What I have seen amongst you has amazed me."

Q.: "I hear you are a writer. Have you written anything about the peasants? What will be their future?"

A.: "Not only do I write, I work for them. To the utmost limit of my own power, I do educational work among them and help them to improve their villages. But my efforts are insignificant compared to the huge educational organisation that has grown up among you in the space of a wonderfully short time."

Q.: "What is your view on the collectivisation of agriculture in our country?"

A.: "I don't know enough about it to give an opinion. I want to hear about it all from you. What I want to know is: is pressure being brought to bear on your wishes?"

Q.: "Don't people in India know about collectivisation and of the other activities here?"

A.: "Very few people have the education to make it possible. Besides information about you is suppressed for many reasons and the little we do get is not always trustworthy."
Q.: "Didn't you even know of the existence of these Peasants' Homes?"

A.: "No, it is only since my arrival in Moscow that I have seen and come to know about all that is being done for your welfare. However, now answer my question. What do you think of the effects of collectivisation on the peasants: what do you want yourselves?"

A young peasant from the Ukraine said: "I work on a collective farm. It was started only two years ago. We grow vegetables and send them to factories where they are tinned. We have also vast fields on which we grow wheat. We work eight hours a day and have every fifth day off. Our production is at least double that of the neighbouring farms which are tilled by their owners themselves.

"Almost from the beginning, the lands belonging to a hundred and fifty peasants were collectivised to create our farm. In 1929, half of them withdrew their lands. The reason was that our officials did not properly carry out the advice of Stalin, the head of the Communist Party. According to him, the keynote of collectivisation is socialised voluntary union. But as in many instances the officials did not remember this, at the beginning many peasants left the collective farm. Gradually, however, a quarter of these people have returned to it again. Now we feel stronger than before. New quarters, a new dining
hall and a school are in the process of construction for our men."

A peasant woman from Siberia followed. She said: "I have been on a collective farm for nearly ten years. Don't forget that the attempt to improve the lot of women is closely connected with collective farming. In the course of the last ten years, peasant women here have changed a good deal. They have now more confidence in themselves. They are bringing about a change in the mentality of those women who are still backward and are the chief obstacle to the collectivisation of agriculture. We women collectivists have formed a group and tour through different provinces, working among women and explaining the advantages of collectivisation for their mental and material welfare. The housekeeping of collectivist peasant women is simplified by the establishment of a crèche, an infant school and a common kitchen in each collective farm."

There is a well-known State farm called Gigant. A peasant woman from there told me about the progress of collectivisation in Russia: "Our land amounts to a hundred thousand hectares. Last year three thousand peasants worked there. The number has decreased a little this year, although the harvest is likely to show an increase over previous years inasmuch as arrangements have been made for the use of scientific manure and tractors. We now have 3
more than three hundred of such tractors. We work eight hours a day. Those who work more are allowed extra wages. In winter when there is less work on the land, peasants leave for towns and engage in house-building, road-making, etc. Even during their absence they receive a third of their wages, while their families may occupy the house allotted to them."

I asked: "Please tell me plainly your opinion for or against the merging of private property in the collective farms."

The superintendent proposed that views should be expressed by show of hands. It was observed that many were opposed to it. I asked them to give reasons for their disapproval, but none of them could do this properly. One said: I do not really know. It was clear that the cause for objection was in human nature. The attachment to one's property is not a subject of argument; it is in human nature. We want to express ourselves: this is a mode of self-expression.

Those who possess higher means than this are great: they do not care for property. They do not regret to lose everything. But for an ordinary mortal, personal property is the language of his individuality: he is struck dumb, as it were, if he loses it. Had it been merely a means of earning one's livelihood and not of self-expression, it would have been easier to convince him by argument that one improves one's livelihood by parting with it. The highest means of self-expression, for instance, intellect and talents cannot be taken away by force: one's property can be confiscated, but one's desire for it cannot be cheated. That is why there is so much cruelty, so much deception and such endless strife in society about its division and enjoyment.

I do not think there can be anything more than a half-way solution to this problem; in other words, private property will remain, but the excessive individualism of its enjoyment will be circumscribed. What overflows these limits must be for the common good. Thus only can attachment to property be prevented from turning into greed, deceit and cruelty.

In trying to solve this problem the Soviets have denied it. Hence there is no end to violence. It cannot be asserted that man shall have no independence, but that he shall not be selfish. In short, for oneself there must be something of one's own: everything else should be for others. A true solution is possible only by recognising both self and non-self. When one of them is forgotten there is conflict with the law of human nature. The man of the West puts too much faith in force. Where force is really necessary, it all goes well: elsewhere it causes mischief. The greater the violence with which we try to reconcile the force of truth with brute force, the greater is the subsequent division between them.
A peasant from the Bashkir Republic in Central Asia said: "Even to-day I possess my own separate land, but I shall soon join a collective farm nearby. I can see that collective farming is much superior to individual farming and the produce much greater. Since efficient farming requires machinery, it is not possible for owners of small plots of land to buy it. Moreover, it is impossible to use machinery on our strips of land."

I said: "Yesterday I had a talk with a high Government official. He told me that the provisions the Soviet authorities had made for the welfare of women and children did not exist anywhere else. I said to him that they probably wanted to abolish the limits of the family by transferring family responsibility to the State. He replied that this was not their immediate object, but if in extending responsibility towards the child, the family naturally disappeared, it would prove that the role of family in society had disappeared of itself in the expansiveness of the new age on account of its narrowness and inadequacy. However, I want to know your opinion on this subject. Do you think that the family can be reconciled with collectivisation?"

The youth from the Ukraine replied: "Let me give you my own example to show how our new social organisation has affected the family. When my father was alive he used to work in the town during the six winter months; during the warmer half of the year I used to take service with the rich and go away with my brothers and sisters to look after their animals. I hardly saw my father, but now no such separation takes place. My son returns from the infant school every day: I see him every day."

A peasant woman added: "Since arrangements have been made to look after and educate children, there is less quarrelling between husband and wife. Besides parents begin to realise how great their responsibility is towards the children."

A young Caucasian woman said to the interpreter: "Tell the poet that we people of the Caucasian Republic in particular realise that we have obtained true freedom and happiness since the October Revolution. We are engaged in ushering in a new age; we fully realise its hard responsibility and are prepared to make the utmost sacrifice for it. Tell the poet that the various races of the Soviet Union want to send through him their sincere good will to the people of India. I can tell him that, if it were possible, I would leave my hearth and home and children to go and help his countrymen."

There was among them one with a Mongolian cast of face. When I asked about him I was informed that he was the son of a Kirghiz peasant and had come to Moscow to learn textile weaving. In three years' time he would return to his
Republic as an engineer; after the revolution a big factory had been established there in which he would work.

Don't forget that people of these different races have received such abundant encouragement and scope for mastering the mystery of the machine mainly because it is not used to further individual interest. The more the people are educated the more it is to the good of everybody, not to the wealthy alone. We accuse the machine of greed and punish the palm trees for drunkenness, just as the school master stands the children in the corner because of his own inefficiency.

I saw with my own eyes how the Russian peasants have left the Indian peasantry behind in less than a decade. Not only have they learnt to read books: they are transformed mentally: they have become men. To speak of education is not the whole story; the tremendous effort for the improvement of agriculture is equally striking. Like India this is also chiefly an agricultural country; therefore unless agricultural knowledge advances as far as possible, the people of the country cannot be saved. This they have not forgotten. They are accomplishing an exceedingly difficult task.

They do not run offices with fat-salaried civil servants: able administrators and skilful scientists are all engaged in this task. The improvement that has taken place in agricultural research in

Russia in the last ten years has become famous in scientific circles throughout the world. Before the War, for instance, nothing was done for the selection of seeds. To-day the authorities have over a million tons of selected seeds at their disposal. Moreover, new crops are no longer confined to the grounds of the Agricultural Colleges alone: they are being rapidly introduced throughout the country. Huge experimental stations have been established even in the outlying provinces like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Ukraine, etc.

When I was last in England I heard for the first time from an Englishman what wonderful things the Soviets were doing for people's welfare. I have now seen them for myself and I have also seen that in their State there is no difference whatsoever of race and colour. The efficient methods they have introduced for spreading education even among the semi-savage races under Soviet rule are beyond the reach of the Indian masses.
VI

BERLIN
2 October, 1930

The dumb have found their voice, the ignorant have cast the veil from their minds, the helpless have become conscious of their own power and those who were in the depths of degradation have come out of society's "black hole" to claim equality with everybody else. This is Soviet Russia's achievement in less than eight years' time.

They are busy there with three things: Education, agriculture and machinery. Along these three roads, the whole nation pursues the task of giving fulness of the mind, body and creative energy. Like us, people there live by agriculture. But our agriculture is ignorant on the one hand, and helpless on the other, deprived of both education and power. Its only feeble support is tradition; it is like the family servant of grand-father's time who works less than he lords it over the household. If one obeys him, one does not move forward at all. And thus agriculture has been limping along for hundreds of years.

At one time, Krishna, the supporter of the Gobardhan hill, must have been the presiding deity of agriculture; he enjoyed his pastime among the cowherds; his elder brother was Balarama, Haladhara, Wielder of the Plough. The plough-weapon is the symbol of man's machine power. Machinery has given strength to agriculture. But to-day Balarama is nowhere to be seen in our agricultural fields: he is ashamed and has gone away across the seas to that shore where the valour of his arm is still undimmed. Russia's agriculture has called him: there in no time the pieces of land have become whole, the touch of his new plough has brought back to life the land that had like Ahalya turned to stone.

One thing must be borne in mind: Rama himself in his aspect of the wielder of the plough is Balarama.

Before the Revolution of 1917, ninety per cent of the peasants had never seen a machine plough. Like our peasants, indeed, they were then so many Ramas, utterly weak, hungry, helpless and dumb. In a trice, as it were, thousands of machine ploughs appeared on their fields. Formerly they were what we in our language call Krishna's creatures, that is, weak; to-day they are the followers of Balarama.

But the machine alone is of little use unless the machinist himself becomes a man. The cultivation of the land advances with the cultivation of the mind in Russia. Here education is living. I have always insisted that education must be
reconciled with life. Separated from it, it belongs to the larder, but does not become food for the digestive organs.

There I found education has become vital, because the boundary of the school does not divide it from daily life. They do not teach in order to prepare pupils for examinations or to produce scholars, but to make all-round men. We have schools in our country, but the mind is greater than education, vigour greater than information; under the weight of the printed word, no energy is left in us to make use of our minds. How often have I tried to draw our boys into discussion, but found that they had nothing to ask. The link between the desire to know and knowledge itself has been severed in them. They have never learnt to want to know; from the very beginning information is being constantly doled out to them in a cut and dried fashion and they collect marks at the examination by repeating what they have been taught.

I remember that once, when on their return from South Africa Mahatmai's boys came to stay at Santiniketan, I asked one of them if he would like to go for a walk to Parul wood. He said, he did not know. He wanted to ask the leader of his party. Ask him later, I said, but tell me whether you would like to go for a walk. I cannot say, he replied again. In other words, this boy himself never exercises his mind independently in any matter; he moves when he is led: he never has anything to say for himself.

Although such total apathy in so small a matter is not usually met with among our boys, yet if a slightly more difficult question is broached their minds will be found quite unprepared. They always wait to hear what those on high have to say. There can be nothing more helpless in the world than such minds.

All manner of experiments are being carried out in Russia in connection with methods of teaching; I shall try to send a detailed account later. One learns much by reading reports and books about an educational system, but the picture of education which can be directly seen in men is the most useful. I saw it the other day when I went to visit one of the educational centres founded in that country called the Pioneers' Commune. The pioneers there are something like our bratibalaks and bratibalikas at Santiniketan.

On entering the house, I found rows of boys and girls waiting on either side of the staircase to welcome me. As soon as I entered the room they crowded round me, as though I were one of their own company. Do not forget that these are all orphans. At one time, the class from which they come had no claims on anybody; abandoned and neglected they spent their days in misery. Looking at their faces I could see that they were not at all faces veiled in the fog of neglect and
humiliation. No diffidence, no awkwardness! There is however a look of resolution on every face; as these children have a field of action before them, it seems as though they are always ready: nowhere is there any scope for remissness or inattention.

In connection with what I said to them in reply to their welcome, one of the boys said: “The bourgeoisie seeks personal profit: we want the wealth of the country to belong to everybody equally. We act according to this principle in our institution.” A girl added: “We take care of ourselves. We act by taking counsel together and agree as to what is best for everybody.” Another boy said: “We may make mistakes, but if we wish we can seek advice from people older than ourselves. If necessary, young boys and girls ask advice from bigger boys and girls and they in their turn go to the teachers. This is the principle of administration in our country. We practise it here.”

From this you will understand that their education is no mere book learning. They are building up their own conduct and character in accordance with a comprehensive ideal of life. They have taken a vow upon themselves in this matter and their glory lies in its fulfilment.

On many an occasion I have said to my boys and girls and teachers that within the small compass of Santiniketan we must give full expression to the sense of responsibility for people’s welfare and of self-government that we claim for the whole country. Here the management must be the combined self-government of the students and teachers; when all our activities reach perfection within this organization, we shall find the solution for our country’s problems. The lesson of subordinating individual wish to the common good cannot be learnt on political platforms: for this we must have the field ready; that field is our institution.

Let me give you a small example. In matters of taste and habits of eating nowhere do we find such vicious practices as in Bengal. We have unnecessarily burdened the kitchen and the digestive organs. Reform is very difficult. In view of the permanent good of the nation, had our boys and teachers been able to resolve upon a proper regulation of their palate and their diet, I should have considered their education a success. We consider the ability to commit to memory three times nine equals twenty-seven as education and naturally think it a grave fault if we neglect to make sure that the boys make no mistake in this, but surely to attach less value to the education about the food that we eat is stupidity! We owe a responsibility to the whole country for what we eat daily and it is a heavy one: to know its implications is far more valuable than scoring pass marks.
I asked them: "What do you do, if anybody does wrong?"

A girl replied: "There is no punishment, because we punish ourselves."

I said: "Tell me in more detail. Supposing somebody commits an offence, do you call a special meeting to punish him? Do you nominate anyone among yourselves as judge? What is the procedure of punishment?"

Another girl said: "It isn't exactly what is called a council of justice: we talk the matter over. To charge anybody with guilt is itself a punishment: there is no greater punishment than this."

A boy added: "He is sorry: we too are sorry: the matter ends there."

I asked: "Supposing a boy thinks that he has been unjustly accused, is there anybody above you who can be appealed to?"

He replied: "Then we take votes. If the majority think that he is guilty, nothing more can be said."

I said: "Perhaps not, but if the boy still persists that he has been unjustly treated by the majority, is there no remedy?"

A girl said: "In that case we shall seek advice from the teachers, but we have never had any such case."

I said: "The endeavour of which you are part itself saves you from wrong."

When I asked them about their duty, they answered: "In other countries people want money and honour; we do not want any such thing: we want people's good. We go to the villagers to teach them and explain to them how to keep clean and do things intelligently. Often we go and live among them. We produce plays and tell them about the country's condition."

Then they wanted to show me what they call the living newspaper. A girl said: "We have to have a great deal of information about the country and it is our duty to tell others what we know, because we can do honest work only when we know and think rightly about the facts."

A boy followed: "First we learn from the books and from our teachers; we then discuss what we have learnt amongst ourselves and finally we are asked to let the public know about it."

They acted the living newspaper before me. The subject was the Five Year Plan. It is like this: they have taken the grim vow of making the whole country efficient by the use of the machine, of utilising electric and steam power from one end of the country to the other. Their country does not mean European Russia alone. It extends far into Asia. There too they will carry their vehicle of power, not to make the rich richer, but to make the community stronger—the community which includes also the swarthy skinned peoples of Central Asia. There is no
fear, no concern that they too should become strong.

Large sums of money are required for this purpose; their bills of exchange do not circulate in the European money-market: they have no alternative but to buy cash. Thus they are buying goods in exchange for their daily bread: corn, meat, eggs and butter are all being sent out to foreign markets. The whole population stands on the brink of starvation. A year and a half must still run. Capitalists of other countries are not pleased. The foreign engineers have damaged a great deal of their machinery too. It is a big and complicated affair, time is short. They dare not prolong the time, because against the opposition of the entire capitalist world it is imperative that they should be able to produce wealth as quickly as possible on their own. Three years have passed in difficulty: two years still remain.

The living newspaper is like a drama: by dancing, singing and waving of the flag they want to proclaim how much success they have attained by the mechanisation of the country’s economic organisation. People must see. Deprived of the necessities of life, those who have been spending their days in dire misery for a long time must be convinced that their misery will presently end, that they must rejoice and embrace suffering with dignity in view of what is to come.

What is consoling in this is that the whole country has at the same time taken this self-denying ordinance upon itself, not any particular section alone. The living newspaper propagates news about other countries in the same fashion. It reminds me of an open air play I saw at Patisar, in Bengal dealing with physiology and salvation: the method is the same: the aim is different. On my return, I am contemplating introducing living newspapers at Santiniketan and Surul.

Their daily time-table is as follows. They get up at 7 in the morning. Then follow fifteen minutes’ physical exercises, wash and breakfast. Classes begin at 8 o’clock. At 1 there is an interval for lunch and rest. Classes continue until 3 o’clock. The curriculum includes the following subjects: history, geography, mathematics, chemistry, physics and biology, mechanics, politics, sociology and literature, handicrafts, carpentry, book-binding and the use of modern machine ploughs, etc. There is no Sunday holiday. There is a holiday on every fifth day. According to the special time-table of the day, the pioneers go on visits to factories, hospitals and villages, etc., after 3 o’clock.

Visits to villages are arranged. On occasion they act their own plays and on others they go to theatres and cinemas. In the evenings, they have story-reading and story-telling and meetings of the debating, literary and scientific societies. On holidays, the pioneers wash some of their clothes.
clean the house inside and out, read books other than their school books and go on rambles. The age for admission is seven or eight and the school leaving age is sixteen. The period of their study is not interrupted by long holidays as in our country, so they get more work done in a short time.

One special feature of the schools here is that the children draw pictures of what they read. In this way the subject of their study is engraved on their minds and skill for drawing develops: their study is combined with the joy of creating beauty. It may possibly seem that they are intent only on work and like boors disdain the arts. Not at all. If you are late, you can hardly obtain admission to high class dramas and operas in the big theatres that date from Tsarist times. There are few to equal these people in the histrionic art. In the old days, only the royalty and nobility enjoyed it. Today the theatres are crowded, so that it is difficult to get in, with those who in the earlier days had no shoes to their feet, whose bodies were covered with torn and dirty clothes, who were half starved, walked day and night in fear of man and God, bribed the priests for salvation and heaped humiliation upon themselves by grovelling in the dust before their masters.

The day I went to the theatre, Tolstoy’s Resurrection was being played. It is by no means certain that the piece is easily enjoyed by the common people. Nevertheless, they listened to it with attention. One cannot imagine Anglo-Saxon peasants and workers enjoying it so calmly and peacefully until the small hours of the morning, let alone our people.

Let me give you another example. There was an exhibition of my pictures in Moscow. These are somewhat unusual, as you know. They are not only foreign, but may be said to belong to no country. None the less, there was no end to the jostling crowd. In a few days, at least five thousand people had seen them. Whatever others may say, I cannot help praising their taste!

Let alone taste. Suppose it is empty curiosity. But to have that alone is the sign of an active mind. I remember, I once brought from America a windmill for our well; it raised water from the depths. But I reproached myself when I found it could evoke no curiosity at all from the depths of the boys’ mind. Look at our power house; how many boys show any interest in it? And yet they all come from good homes. Where mind is sluggish, curiosity is feeble.

I have received a number of pictures drawn by Soviet school-children; one is amazed to see them: they are real pictures, not copies, but their own inventions. I am reassured to see that they have their eyes on both construction and creation. Since I came to Russia I have had to think a good deal on our national education. With my solitary
and modest powers I have gathered some new experience and shall put it into practice. But where is the time?—My five year plan may never be completed. For nearly thirty years I have dragged the boat along alone and against opposition: I must try to do the same for another few years, but it will not progress far I well know; still I shall not complain. There is no more time to-day. By this evening's train I start out to take the boat: the crossing begins tomorrow.

VII

S.S. "Bremen", Atlantic, 3 October, 1930

I am on my way to the American shores. But to-day my mind is filled with memories of Russia. The chief reason is that the other countries I have visited have never so wholly stirred my mind. Their manifold activities are confined within separate compartments; here politics, there hospitals, somewhere else are universities and museums: specialists are busy with them all. But there the whole country, intent on one purpose, has gathered up all the activities of the land in one nervous system and assumed a giant body and a colossal personality.

In the countries where the pursuit of wealth and power is divided by individual self-interest, such close unity of mind is impossible. During the five years of the European War, the bulk of the activities of different countries was perforce united, although only temporarily, in one purpose and mind, but it is the very essence of what is happening in Soviet Russia; there they are creating an extraordinary entity called common task, common mind and common property.

Since my visit to Russia I have realised a
saying of the *Upanishads*: *ma gridhah*—do not covet. Why not? Because everything is pervaded by the one truth: personal greed alone impedes its realisation. *Tena tyaktena bhunjithah*—enjoy only that which issues from this unity. The Bolsheviks are saying the same thing about the material side of life. They recognise only one absolute human truth in all humanity; enjoy only that, they say, which is produced by this unity: *ma gridhah kasyasviddhanam*—do not covet others’ possessions. But greed is bound to arise wherever there is personal division of wealth. By sweeping this away they want to say: *tena tyaktena bhunjithah*.

In all other European countries the national endeavour is for individual gain and enjoyment. Its stir is tremendous; indeed like the churning of the ocean in the Puranas, it brings to the top both poison and nectar. But nectar falls to the share of a few only: the majority have the poison—there is endless unrest on this account. In the past everybody agreed that it was inevitable: greed was in human character, they said; inequality of enjoyment was in its very nature. Hence competition will continue but one must understand that unity alone is true, division is illusion; the moment we refuse to accept it by right thought and right action, it will disappear like a dream.

In Russia this effort at non-recognition is being carried on all over the country. Everything has been subordinated to this one single effort. For this reason, on arriving there I felt the impact of a great mind. Nowhere else had I come across such a splendid phase of education, because in other countries the fruit of education is for him alone who receives it. There one’s education is a matter of everybody’s education. The want of education in an individual affects everybody equally, because they want to fructify by combined education the entire mind of the community and for the service of humanity. They are *viswakarma*—hence they must be world-minded: the real university is for them.

The Soviets are spreading education by various means. One of them is the museum. Every village and town has been covered by a network of all sorts of museums. Such museums are not passive like our library at Santiniketan, but active.

Regional study extends all over Russia. Such educational centres number nearly 2,000 and their membership is over seventy thousand. Past history and past and present economic conditions are studied at the respective local centres; the productivity of soils is analysed and minerals searched. The spread of education by means of museums attached to these centres is a heavy responsibility. The wide-spread regional study and the museums connected with it are some of the chief means of progress in the new era of
education that has been initiated in the Soviet State.

Kalimohan has done a certain amount of similar work in the neighbourhood of Sarni-niketan, but to little effect, as our students and teachers were not connected with it. To prepare the mind for enquiry is not less important than to reap its fruit. I heard that Prabhat had with the students of the Economics Department of the College laid the foundations of such studies, but this must be done more generally; the boys of the School Department too must be initiated into this work and a museum of provincial exhibits established.

You will no doubt like to hear something about the management of picture galleries in Russia. In Moscow there is a famous collection of pictures called the Tretyakov Gallery. Nearly three hundred thousand people visited it in the space of a year between 1928 and 1929. It has become difficult to accommodate all who want to visit it, so on holidays visitors have to register their names beforehand.

Before the introduction of Soviet rule in 1917, those who came to visit these galleries were the aristocrats, the learned and that class whom there they call the bourgeoisie. Now instead come the wage-earners, such as masons, blacksmiths, grocers and tailors. And there also come Soviet soldiers, army officers, students and peasants.

They have gradually to create artistic sense in the minds of these people. To tyros like these, proper appreciation of the mysteries of art is at first sight impossible. They roam around looking at the pictures on the walls, bewildered. Hence almost at every museum they have competent guides in attendance. They are chosen from the scientific officials attached to the educational section of the museum or other similar State institutions. They have no monetary transactions with the visitors. The guides must realise however that it is not enough for the visitors to know the subject matter of the picture.

Even now very few people understand composition, colour scheme, space and illumination of a picture or the technique by which the particular school to which it belongs is known. The guide therefore must be thoroughly well-versed in his subject; thus alone can he arouse the curiosity and attention of the visitors. He must also understand that the museum does not contain one picture only, so that it should not be the object of the visitors to recognise one picture alone, but to understand all pictures kept in the museum according to their technical classification. The duty of the guide should be to select a few special pictures and explain their character. The pictures to be discussed must not be too numerous, nor must more than twenty minutes be devoted to them. The main thing to explain is that pictures
have a language, a rhythm of their own; what is necessary is to make the relation between the form and the theme and idea of the picture intelligible. It is sometimes useful to indicate the peculiarity of some pictures by showing their dissimilarity with others. One must stop as soon as the visitors feel in the least tired.

I have culled the above from a report to show how ignorant visitors are taught to see pictures. What our people should take note of in it is this:—as I have said in my previous letter, they are doing their utmost to strengthen as quickly as possible the whole country through the power of agriculture and machinery. This is dreadfully practical. This is a colossal effort on their part to stand on their own in competition with the richer countries.

Whenever there is talk of nation-wide political activity in our country, we begin to say: let us light one red torch and blow out the lamps in all other walks of life, lest people's attention should flag. Fine arts, in particular, are opposed to all grim resolution. Our countrymen must be turned into wrestlers to the constant beat of hands: were it possible to turn the vina of the Goddess of Learning into a club, well and good, otherwise no, never. . . . On coming to Russia one clearly realises the hollowness of these mock heroics. What abundant preparation for the very workers whom they are training to run factories all over the country, so that they too may appreciate pictures with an enlightened mind. They know that those who cannot appreciate beauty are uncultured; they are rude outside but weak within. The dramatic art has made extraordinary progress in Russia. They have danced and sung and acted even through the revolution of 1917 and the terrible famine which came in its wake; there has been no conflict with the unrolling of their great historical drama.

There is no power in the desert. The true image of power is seen there alone where water gushes out of the heart of the stone: where the surging beauty of the spring lends fascination to the sublimity of the mountain. Vikramaditya cleared India of the invading Scythians, but never forbade Kalidasa to compose the Megha-duta (Cloud Messenger). It cannot be denied that the Japanese can wield the sword, but with equal cunning they can also wield the brush. If on coming to Russia I had found that they had all turned themselves into workers only and were busy supplying materials to the factory or guiding the ploughshare, I should have known that they would dry up and die. The tree which has stopped rustling its leaves and prides itself on the wooden rattle that could be produced out of it is surely the dead timber of the carpenter's shop: it may be very strong but is equally fruitless. Therefore let me tell our heroes and warn our
devotees that when I return home, my dancing and singing will not cease, even through the downpour of puritanic admonition.

The art that flourishes on the Russian stage displays ceaseless courage of new creation. This daring of new creation too is active in their social revolution. In society, politics, art, nowhere have they feared the new.

The Soviet revolutionaries have uprooted the old religious organisation and the political system, both of which for centuries had subdued their minds and sapped their vitality. Because even a king, however much he may limit the freedom of his subjects from without, cannot be a greater enemy than the religion which kills man's freedom of mind by taking advantage of his ignorance. It has been observed so far that the king who wants to keep his subjects in bondage finds his chief support in the religion which keeps them blind. That religion is like the poison-princess who fascinates by embracing and kills by fascinating. The arrow of piety enters the heart deeper than the arrow of death, because it kills without hurting.

The Soviets have saved the country from the insults of the Tsars and self-imposed humiliation; however much the devout people of other countries may reproach them, I personally cannot. Far better is atheism than religious infatuation. That darkens the mind and keeps the soul in a dungeon.

In visiting Russia my only object was to see in a short time what is being done there for the spread of education and its results.

It is my opinion that all the sufferings that rise out of the breast of India to pierce the skies are rooted in ignorance. Caste distinction, religious animosity, lack of initiative and material weakness, all cling round lack of education. The Simon Commission after having exhausted the list of India's crimes has admitted only one fault in the British rule and that is the failure to provide a sufficient measure of education. But was it necessary to add anything more? Suppose one says that the householder has not learnt to be careful: that he stumbles on the door frame in passing from one room to another; that he is frightened by shadows, mistakes his brother for a thief and wants to beat him with upraised stick: that he constantly hugs his bed and has not the courage to go about: that when he is hungry he cannot find food: in fact that all roads are closed to him except reliance on fate; therefore the management of his household cannot be
left to him. But how would it sound if at the end of it all one added sotto voce: His lamp has been blown out?

Once in Europe they burnt innocent women as witches, killed scientists as sinners and remorselessly crushed freedom of religious belief and denied political rights to religious communities other than their own. How much more blindness, stupidity and wicked usage can be piled up from the history of the Middle Ages: but how did it all disappear? Were they to be put in charge of an outside Court of Wards for the reform of their weakness? The only power that helped them to progress was education.

It is by education alone that Japan has within a short time brought the country’s political power within the ambit of public opinion and effort and multiplied a thousandfold her power of material production; modern Turkey is well on the way to rid herself of the dreadful burden of religious fanaticism by advancing education with tremendous zeal. “India alone sleeps,” because light is not allowed into her house, the light of education that keeps the modern world awake remains without the closed doors of India.

When I set out for Russia I did not expect much; the measure of what is attainable and what is not, I had obtained from British ruled India. Some of our foreign friends have proclaimed in baleful tones how enormous the difficulty of pro-
gress in India is. I have had to agree that there are difficulties, or else why should we be in such a condition? One thing I knew, however, that is, that the improvement of the masses of Russia was not less, if not more, difficult than that of India. In the first place, the inner and outer state of the people other than the gentry in that country was similar to ours: similiar illiteracy and helplessness; their faculties crushed under the dead weight of ritual and priesthood, omens, amulets and charms; their self-respect sullied by dust from the boots of their superiors. They enjoyed none of the advantages and opportunities of the modern scientific age: their destiny was possessed by the ghost of their forefathers; it kept them bound to the immovable peg of a thousand years ago; and when at last their blood was up, there was no limit to the brutal cruelties they inflicted on their Jewish neighbours. They did violence to people of their own class as readily as they bowed to the lashes of their superiors.

Such was their condition. The people who hold their destiny in their hands at present are not as powerful as the English: they came to power only in 1917; they have had neither time nor energy fully to secure stability for their political organisation; there is antagonism both at home and abroad. The “difficulty” of the vow they have taken to make the masses strong and enlightened is many times more than that of the rulers of India.
Thus it would have been unjust to expect to see anything in Russia. What do we know or how much have we seen to strengthen our expectations? I hear that there is a good deal of coercion; summary punishment without trial also exists; there is freedom in other respects, but none to call in question the dispensation of the authorities: But this is only the shadow side of the moon; my main object was to see her bright side.

It is said that in some European places of pilgrimage, the lame from birth has by divine grace suddenly been made whole: this is what has happened here; in a trice, as it were, the cripple’s crutch has turned into a chariot that goes careering about. In human society the people of Russia stand with their heads held high: their minds and hands have become their own.

I am nearly seventy but have never lost patience before. Looking at the intolerable burden of ignorance of our country, I have blamed our fate more than anything else. I have even tried modest remedies with my humble powers, but the number of miles that the chariot of my feeble hopes has travelled is less than the number of breakdowns it has had. When I looked at the misery of the unfortunate wretches of our country, I sacrificed my pride. I asked for help from the authorities; what is most regrettable and shameful is that it is our compatriots brought up on crumbs from their tables who have opposed this help most. This is the most serious disease in countries under foreign domination. There is no greater poison than the jealousy, pettiness and antagonism to one’s kith and kin in the minds of people in these countries.

Be that as it may, I had read in books and heard of the “enormous difficulties” of this country, but now I have seen how they can be overcome.