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FRIENDLY WORDS

TO

EDUCATED NATIVES.

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THE LAW OF PROGRESS.

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Friendly Words to Educated Natives.

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THE law of progress meets us every-where. Plants do not spring into existence full blown, but from very slight beginnings advance from one state to another, waiting for the successive seasons to give them successive opportunities of development, until at length they stand before us rich in beauty, fragrance and fruit; when there is no more development possible they are ready to fade and vanish away. It is thus with the animals. In some instances an animal attains the highest development possible in one condition, and then undergoes a transition; from a creeping thing it becomes a winged creature moving in another element altogether. The rains that fall so abundantly on high mountains flow thence to the plains carrying alluvial soil that is

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made eventually to blossom as the rose. The young man is keenly sensible that the same law of progress is written in his nature, urging him to forget the things that are behind and press eagerly forward after higher attainments and achievements. And the same law of progress should find expression in the history of every nation. To suppose that the duty of a nation is to keep looking back to the point from which it started, as the highest expression of national life, is to put oneself in conflict with universal things. How strange that any nation should allow itself to be inveigled into the opinion that the highest attainments in religion, philosophy, or art were made three or four thousand years ago, and that all recession in time must necessarily be retrocession in wisdom, knowledge, and power. A nation that deliberately and finally takes up with this idea, sins against itself, sins against its ancestry and sins against humanity. In the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews mention is made of the worthy men and women who

in ancient times served their generation, and the argument drawn is this :

“ Seeing that we are all compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with persistence the race set before us.”

The ancients are represented as witnessing to us from the skies that it is not a vain thing to serve God, and as urging us to press forward and improve upon their example. When one nation deliberately makes an idol of its antiquity, and denies itself the right to think that its antecedents can be improved upon, it pronounces its own doom.

Under the teaching of a priestly caste, who dreaded innovation as likely to imperil the distinguished position which they had secured to themselves, the people of India have for long centuries discarded the law of progress, and fancied that their highest obligation was to stand still, with their eyes fixed upon the Past. Happily this deplorable idea has been a good deal shaken of late, and there are

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some signs that the Hindu people will before long shake off the incubus of ages and give us to behold the uprising of a great nation. The best proof of an honourable antiquity is furnished when it becomes a powerful inspiration to posterity to press forward in knowledge, virtue and usefulness. It may be said that the highest truth was given to our forefathers, and that there can be, in the nature of things, no advance upon this. Allowing this, truth is a blessing only as it is applied, and brought to bear upon the highest welfare of the largest number. Dead truth, truth buried in disregarded books, is of no more value than falsehood. God has not wedded a nation to dead truth, but to living truth. Every generation has its own peculiar circumstances, conditions and necessities, and is under obligation to lay hold of the truth and apply it to these. Truth is compared to a river of life flowing from the throne of God ; arrest this river at any point and it turns aside and flows elsewhere ; it must flow, it cannot stand still ; where-

ever it finds suitable channels and opportunities, it blesses, it vivifies, it transforms.

Sometimes a transitional period occurs in the life of a nation, when the truths and traditions upon which it has been hitherto living are inadequate for the functions to which it now feels called. It may be that the primitive truths have got mixed up with a good deal of error; and it may be that they were adapted to an inferior stage of national existence. There is a kind of food adapted to the infant which is not at all adapted to the grown man; and there is a form of truth adapted to a nation that is isolated and cut off from communication with others, and another form that is suited to that nation when, through the force of circumstances, it finds itself brought into unavoidable and intimate association with other nations. Happy the nation that is able to recognize the voice of providence speaking to her out of the whirlwind of political revolutions, and bidding her come up higher and enter upon a new sphere of national existence.

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The Jewish nation affords us a striking example of the difficulty of effecting such a transition as we have spoken of. By their religion, their code and their usages they were separated from other nations more effectually than China could ever be, with her great Northern wall. They believed that God had separated them from other nations that they might maintain the worship and receive the revelation of the One living and true God, and not be betrayed into idolatry, and that they might preserve the Scriptures in an incorrupt state. Their institutions, their distinctions of clean and unclean, and above all their expectation of a Messiah, or divinely appointed Saviour, tended to keep them from being lost among other nations. In the centuries just preceding the Christian era, many of the Jewish people were scattered in various parts of the Roman empire, but were careful to keep themselves religiously and socially from the surrounding people, having their synagogues for the reading of their Scriptures and the worship of the one God, and being careful

to go up to Jerusalem at least once a year to keep one of the great annual feasts. But any one who will closely examine their sacred books, will find prophecies concerning a very different condition of things. A time is indicated when the Jews, instead of being required to conserve for themselves the knowledge and favour of the true God, will be commissioned to communicate them to all nations and share them with all. God will then no longer favour or tolerate their exclusivism, but will cause them to rejoice in the utmost diffusion of the blessings of true religion. To Abraham, the patriarch and progenitor of the Jewish people, the promise was given, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Well, the time came when the Jews, according to the counsel of God, should lay aside everything that tended to keep them isolated, and exclusive, and seek to share with all nations the blessings of pure religion. But now it appeared that they had become so much attached to the customs and ideas that had come down to

them from their ancestors that they were altogether unwilling to turn from them, and could see no beauty or excellence in the better system that God sought to introduce. The spirit of conservatism had become very strongly developed, and the feeling of national pride led them to set themselves against every attempt to cast down the middle wall of partition between them and other nations. They had been brought into subjection to a foreign people; the Romans had taken possession of their country; they found themselves in the presence of a dominant power, haughty, idolatrous and unwilling to learn from them; but all this only intensified their pride. Instead of recognizing the call of God, summoning them to repentance and humility, instead of perceiving that the peculiar institutions of which they made their boast had fulfilled their time and were ready to vanish away, they valued more the crumbs that fell from the ancestral table, than the Gospel which Christ so earnestly proclaimed unto them, and said, the old is better than the new.

They would not have the divinely-appointed Leader who would have led them to spiritual liberty, happiness and power, they clung tenaciously to their temple, their ceremonial law, their isolation, their sacrifices, their priesthood, and above all to the idea of their own righteousness and superiority to the people of other nations. Those of them that understood the signs of the times, recognized in Jesus the promised Messiah, received a baptism of love and sought the salvation of all, were made happy and holy and useful, and laid the foundations of the Church of Christ, the City of God. But the great body of the people clung to their Mosaic exclusiveness, though they were scattered in the providence of God among all nations, and for eighteen centuries have been without the Temple, without sacrifices, without prophets, always looking backward, never finding the glory, honour and sovereignty promised in the Scriptures.

We have gone into this case, because it strikingly illustrates the difficulty of as-

ending from one stratum of national existence to another. There is much in the Jewish code that meets us in varying forms in Hinduism. We find in Hinduism certain institutions and phases of religious thought that may be well enough adapted to the days when nations were shut up in themselves and could not conceive of any contact with other nations except that which was hostile. We are speaking of what may be true in Hinduism ; our argument does not even require us to disentangle the true from the erroneous. You have received many things from your ancestors which you believe to be true, and the question we press upon you is this, is the truth in these ancient legacies that truth which you need to-day ? What are the signs of the times ? What is the voice of Providence to you this day ? Whether you like it or not, the day of national exclusivism has gone by ; the frontiers and barriers of all nations are passing away ; separating walls fall to the ground ; all countries are becoming one as regards communications, and whatever leavens

one nation tends to leaven all. God calls you to consent to the law of transition, and pass to a higher phase of religion, and bids you lay aside whatever tends to hinder this emergence to a higher platform. Mother's milk is helpful to the infant; but the time comes when health and strength are conditioned on some other food. The spirit of conservatism may once have been helpful to you, but if it now moves you to resist the Gospel it is your enemy. As the young wife when called to go to the house of her husband, is obliged to turn her back upon the home of her youth, so the Gospel requires that you should now turn from the past to the future and rise to a higher national existence. He that loses his life shall save it, says Christ; and this is true of nations as of individuals. Instead of cherishing the idea of national superiority, let the Hindoo and let the Englishman learn Christ's law of universal life, and esteem national power only as it gives the means of communicating greater blessings to other nations.

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The supposition that God bestowed maturity of knowledge upon the human race in its infancy, so that as the ages went by men who would have to be looking back to the golden age, and, in the nature of things, losing more and more of their interest in it, is in conflict with the ordinary character of the divine procedure as traceable in the world around us. In nature, God sets before us many lessons, but there is an order and a progress to be observed in learning them without which all becomes confusion. The science of astronomy has been slowly acquired in the successive milleniums, until at last men have come to the true conception of the solar system, the stellar system and the relation of that to these. In the beginning we naturally lay hold of that which is most easily understood, and the right understanding of which enables us to comprehend something else, and thus we move on step by step. As the pillar of fire moved before the Israelites conducting them through the wilderness to Ca-

naan, so the bow of promise waits upon the developing powers of the individual man. We look upon the new-born babe, and find little else but promise in its feeble and helpless organization. There is a promise that the babe will see, and presently it takes its first lessons in seeing ; there is a promise that it shall hear, and soon it gives tokens that it is beginning to hear. At each acquisition, the bow of promise removes one step onward. Soon the child comes to recognise this order of things ; it is ever pressing forward to a higher condition, with larger powers and a widening sphere, and so, pursuing promise after promise, makes its way to adolescence and manhood. We believe that God has similarly dealt with the race, and that we have the proof of it in the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians. In the matter of revelation, God, a being of infinite wisdom, is addressing man who has every thing to learn, and would never think of pouring at once upon his undisciplined mind all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but would

undoubtedly deal with the race as he deals with the individual, communicating line upon line. Scarcely had Adam and Eve broken the commandment of God, when a promise was given to the race of man, a promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, the personification of evil. From this time onward promise succeeds promise, stimulating men to press forward to a higher condition. To Abraham was given the promise of a descendant through whom blessings should accrue to all nations. During the 2000 years intervening between Abraham and Christ, the promises of the Messianic kingdom became more specific and more vivid, stimulating the aspirations and hopes of the Jews. And similarly in the New Testament, Christians are taught to look forward to a heavenly condition with elements of bliss and power beyond those that are now known. This method of dealing with men is certainly more accordant with the constitution and course of nature than the method of endowing

mankind with a perfect system at the beginning of the history of our race would have been. This last indeed is in direct contradiction with the processes we find indicated in all other departments of the divine Government of the world. A retroverted attitude is and must be fatal to an individual, to a nation and to the race.

God speaks to man out of the future, summoning him forward. God is now speaking to India out of the future. As the bride is addressed in the 45th Psalm: "Hearken, oh daughter, and consider and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire the beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." So India is addressed from on high. The word forget is here used not in an absolute sense but in a comparative. There is no call to India to disregard whatever of truth may have been given to her in her infancy, but to take up the attitude of expectation, and believe that God has greater and better things in re-

serve for her than she has yet experienced. "We are saved by hope" says the Apostle Paul; hope that leads us to forget the things that are behind, the experiences already attained, and press forward into new. The religious ideas of a period when this nation was made to believe that a revelation had been given to her exclusively, all the other nations of the world being represented as mlecchas or outside barbarians, are certainly not those that should rule the minds of men to-day. The religion of caste may be relegated to the past. What is wanted is a message from heaven addressed to all alike, bringing man into harmony with God, giving him victory over sin, and causing each to love his neighbour as himself. And what is wanted is offered.



