

# CURRENT THOUGHT

*That which exists is One :*

*The wise name It variously*

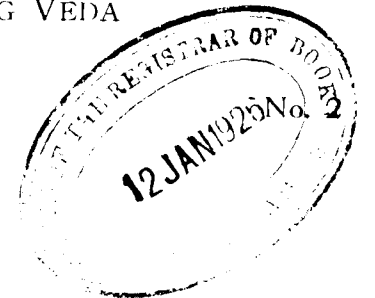
—RIG VEDA

Vol. II

NOVEMBER 1925

## Romain Rolland

BY DILIP KUMAR ROY



“THE more closely one reviews the biographies of great artists the more is one struck by the preponderance of sorrow that has ever fallen to their lot. The reason is to be sought not merely in the circumstances that they had to undergo their shares of trials and disillusionments of life, (which could not but wound their finer susceptibilities more cruelly); the chief reason consists in this that their very genius, which put them ahead of their age by twenty, thirty, fifty years (even several centuries sometimes) thereby devastated their lives and condemned them to desperate efforts not only to be victorious, but even merely to live.”\*

This remark made by Rolland in 1903 anent the misfortune of great artists in general is of peculiar significance. For it embodies one of his deepest early convictions—a conviction, which fortified him not a little throughout his own life of protracted trials and tribulations. For it braced him up to a bold envisaging of

the hard reality, *pari passu* with enabling him to plumb the depth of the mystic truth underlying the apparent antinomies of life. For doubtless, it is only some such unshakable faith in the invisible working of a directing purpose behind life's apparent contradictions that can transmute the very tragedies of artists' lives to a source of inspiration for their creative vision.

A man does not become a hero all of a sudden. It has been aptly remarked by a great Belgian that only he can become a hero in action who has long been a hero in thought\*. Nevertheless, little did Rolland dream when he wrote the foregoing lines how vividly he was to realise their truth in his own life and that very shortly.

His years of preparation during his mediocrity and his often inexplicable disappointments in literature stood him, however, in good stead when the call to heroism came in 1914. That apocalyptic year dashed the long-cherished hopes of many a smiling optimist to the

\* La vie de Hugo Wolf. . . . Musiciens d'Aujourd'hui " Plus on penetre dans l'histoire des grands artistes ". . . . etc.

\* La sagesse et Destinee—Maeterlinck.

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VOL. II  
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to his vocation lies only in the sacrifice which he makes for it of his leisure and love of ease."

Although Rolland could not agree with Tolstoy's views on art and music in general, he was deeply inspired for good by this proof of the latter's sincerity to be of service to others. Later in life Rolland testified magnificently to the abiding impression made on him by this example. For it has ever been his habit to reply to everybody who has written to him with a spiritual doubt. He has never put forward the excuse of want of time—however hard pressed for time he may have been. Zweig writes truly apropos:

"Rarely has history produced a more beautiful example of the truth of the principle of conservation of energy in the moral as in the physical world. The hours that Tolstoy devoted to the answering of an unknown correspondent have been revived in a thousand letters which Rolland has written to so many equally unknown to him. An infinite quantity of seed has thus been scattered throughout the world to-day by the sowing of this single grain of kindness by Tolstoy."\*

Rolland's brilliance at school procured him a scholarship and his being sent to Rome as a research student. In Rome Rolland's love of art was stimulated not only by the proverbial spirit of artistic Italy but also by a deep friendship with an old lady, Malwida Von Meysenburg. She was a lady of wonderful culture and was at once taken with the innate nobility and glowing idealism of her youthful friend. It was a touching

\* Selten hat die Geschichte schöner als an diesem Beispiel bezeugt, daß in der moralischen Welt wie in der irdischen nie ein Atom an Kraft verloren geht. Die Stunde die Tolstoi wegwarf an einen Unbekannten, ist auferstanden in tausend Briefen Rollands an tausend Unbekannte, unendliche Saat weht heute durch die Welt von diesen einzelnen hingestreuten der Gute.....from "Romain Rolland der Maun und das Werk."

friendship. Rolland used to play to her with all the emotional fervour of his ardent nature. And she loved to hear him play so exquisitely and sincerely. Rolland too on his part used to drink in the enumerations of her intimate reminiscences of personalities like Mazzini, Wagner, Nietzsche, Herzen and others. Rolland is recognised to-day to be pre-eminently gifted with a truly European vision and for this he owes not a little to the motherly friend of his youth. For her wide culture and continental experiences helped him not a little to expand early into the comprehensive European soul in contradistinction to the provincial.

On his return from Rome Rolland's thesis, "Les Origines du theatre lyriques modernes" earned him the professorship of the history of music in the Sorbonne. He wrote there some fine musical critiques such as, "Musiciens d'autrefois", "Musiciens d'aujourd'hui", "La vie de Handel" etc.

His life here seemed secure. Things flowed smoothly for him. His lectures earned him the esteem of students as well as of connoisseurs. So much so that even outsiders used to attend them, so interesting and instructive they were. He might well have ended his life as a worthy and venerable professor had he continued in his role of lecturer. But Rolland was not a man to lie contented in a narrow groove, however sure the prospects and reassuring the income. For has not one of his earliest mottos in life been 'to be great and defend greatness on earth'?\* He felt an irresistible call to plunge into heroic adventures. For that way pointed the fulfilment of his destiny.

He renounced his professorship and sounded a clarion-call for the reform of

\* "Notre devoir est d'être grand et de défendre la grandeur sur terre". . . . "Le Triomphe de la raison."

the French stage. The current French plays had at this time lost

ground. For it needed indeed

great biographies of Michel



boleth of to

all be said to be representative

naturally and

organisers of the Association









workman's share of profits produced by the industry in which he is employed. Payment in the name of wages up to "the least that will support the worker and enable him to perpetuate his kind" (which Ricardo called the natural law of wages) would form part of the cost of production, in about the same way as the maintenance of the machinery or cattle used in the industry would form part of it. Any surplus left, after these charges and rents, rates, taxes and other usual items of the cost of production, as also capital's minimum wage (viz., a return equivalent to the rate of interest on gilt-edged securities, plus an insurance allowance commensurate with the speculative risk of the industry) are met, is to be divided between the workers and the capitalists.

For deciding the numerous problems which would arise from such an arrangement the author would provide "effective councils on which, employer, workman and community are represented, the latter with a preponderating voice because its interests are all in the direction of economic efficiency," and enact that access to all financial matters obtaining in the particular industry under consideration, and also to its full accounts be given to such councils.

While the above ideas are very interesting, as showing the lines along which modern industrial communities might with advantage strike to work, it is felt that the propositions laid down in the book are not so simple or practical as they look. It is very desirable that the minimum wage, (or for the matter of that, the dole for the unemployed member of Society) should provide not only adequate food and housing, but also food for the higher qualities of "admiration, hope and love" which distinguish him from the lower animals. But is it possible to do so for any industrial community, when workers in a competing industrial community are supporting a much lower standard of living? State help cannot be extended indefinitely,

because the State has, to put it plainly, to balance its budget. The revenue of the State, which are, in the last instance, realised from the earnings of the Community through agriculture, industries or other services, must be such as to support the standard for the dole or the minimum wage laid down, without its having to resort to such measures as inflation. Very few countries are in this happy condition, and modern industrial competition enforces on the worker in every country the standard of living adopted in the competing country in which it is at its lowest level.

The book proposes to debit to the cost of production labour's minimum wage, and also capital's minimum wage, viz. a, return on capital in the shape of interest equal to the return from gilt-edged securities plus an amount commensurate with the speculative risk of the industry. After both these charges and all other costs of manufacture are met, any surplus that may be left is to be divided between the workers and the employees *pro rata*. This arrangement would go against pioneering industrial enterprises. It is the general experience of industrialists that a new industry (and therefore an industry from which the community stands to benefit the most in the long run) does not pay its way at the start for a number of years. It must provide the minimum wage for the worker, but it cannot provide a minimum return to capital. It is hardly equitable, when after a number of years the industry comes into its own, to ask Capital to immediately share its gains with Labour. Such an arrangement would act as a damper to industrial progress, apart from its equity or inequity.

In the chapter on The Minimum Wage and International Relations, the author rightly lays stress on the fact that the material prosperity of one country is linked up with that of every other country with which it has trade relations, and says that "the provision of a real minimum wage is made much easier by prosperity in Russia and

the revival of Germany as an effective producing member of the comity of nations." But when he goes on to regard the exaction of reparations from Germany, as an act of self-sacrifice on the part of the allies, one feels that his patriotism gets rid of his regard for economic truth.

While the shortcomings of the book from the standpoint of the practical economist or statesman may be noted, it must be added that the book is a very thought-provoking contribution to the question of a fair wage for workers—a question of no small importance in these days of strife between Labour and Capital.

R. G













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The book is full of sublime sentiments, inspiring thoughts, sound advice and practical suggestions for those who are engaged in the patriotic and humanitarian



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