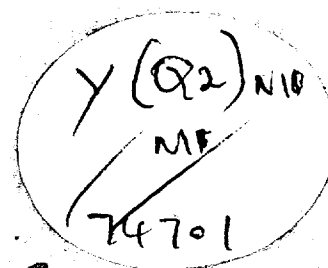


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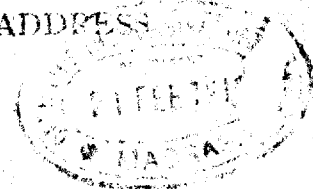
HINDU SOCIAL REFORMS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



DELIVERED BY

C. V. KRISHNASWAMI Aiyar, B.A., B.L.

District Munsif, Tiruvelur

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AT THE

TANJORE DISTRICT SOCIAL CONFERENCE

18th December 1910

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 * செப்பனிடுவதற்காக எடுத்துக் *
 * கொள்ளப்பட்ட *
 * திருநெல்வேலி *
 * மாதம் வருடம் 1990 *
 * செப்பனிடும் முறை *
 * திருநெல்வேலி *
 * மாதம் வருடம் 1990 *
 * ஆராய்ச்சி அதிகாரிகள் *
 * கையொப்பம் *

Address delivered by M. R. RY. O. V. KRISHNASWAMI
 AIYAR, District Munsif, as President of the Tanjore Dis-
 trict Social Conference, held at Tiruvalur on Sunday, the
 18th December 1910.

GENTLEMEN,

I offer you my heartiest thanks for the high honour you have done me,—a comparatively young man,—in calling me to the chair to-day. I would have preferred that some one with more experience of life, and with a better record of practical work in the field of social reform had been elected the President of this Conference. But it is your pleasure that I should occupy the chair now, and it is perhaps no use telling you how unworthy I feel of the great compliment you have paid me. I can only pray that when the day's work is over, and the Conference has closed, you would not altogether regret your choice. Gentlemen, in a gathering like this, the uppermost thought in our minds is the irreparable loss which we have all sustained by reason of the passing away of our beloved Emperor Edward VII. V. his loyal subjects, have many reasons to remember his short reign, but as social reformers we will always regret that his Coronation was the first occasion when princes like the Maharaja of Jeypore crossed the demonstrated to us all that crossing the *Kalapani* against our Shastras. I am sure that I am voicing of you all, when I say that we desire to express to His Majesty Emperor George V our profound loyalty to His person and throne, and our fervent desire for His long life and prosperity. Gentlemen, the problem of Social Reform is—a rather ticklish one. It is easy to speak enthusiastically about it. It is easy to deliver long orations on it. It is easy to write learned essays about it. But when it comes to putting a tiche

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of our professions into practice, well, there is the rub, to use a familiar expression. Most of us feel that the lot of the child widow is miserable. I do not say "all", because I find that there are some even among the educated who fancy that she must congratulate herself on the opportunity afforded by her widowhood for social service. Some go even further and advocate her remarriage. But when one of the preachers becomes a widower, and has an opportunity to put his profession into practice, he suddenly develops a fancy for unmarried girls. When a friend has the courage to get his widowed daughter married, we, who on other platforms talk glibly on universal brotherhood, the universality of atman, *et hoc genus omne*, find that either we have "a niyamam" against "parannam," or that there is some other occult objection to dining with our whilom friend. Most of us are willing to agree that marriage after puberty is very desirable from all points of view. Some of us would prove to our entire satisfaction that Hindu girls of old were ordinarily married only after puberty. We would go even further and contend that it is the only form of marriage sanctioned and allowed by our Shastras. But we find that girls are for some reason or other married early. We would all agree that caste distinctions of economic laws as to division of labour. We find that not only are the soul of a Brahman and a Sudra identical, but that they are also the universal soul. Yet the enthusiast who at a cosmopolitan dinner has more letters of excuses for the weather on that day suddenly becomes inclement, or there is an influx of unexpected guests in the houses of the invited. Now this is not the fate of the smaller fry alone. We know Kasinath Trimbak Telang had to get his daughter married very young in spite of his voting against early marriage. We know of a worthy Madraasee,

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who soon after an association was started with marriage after puberty as one of the planks of its platform, got his daughter married long before the age of puberty. We are told that even the great Ranade underwent a *prayaschit* because he had the temerity to take a cup of tea at the same table with a European. Gentlemen, I mention these incidents in no carping spirit. Far be it from me to speak slightingly of those giants-men, who I know, have by reason of their character and learning, been leaders of various useful movements in their time. I know that reluctantly they gave way to those family ties which Bacon calls "the discipline of humanity," and which are dear to every son and daughter of the East. I refer to these more with a view to draw your attention to the magnitude of the task before us, to the forces that make even the strongest of us unable to carry out our professions, and to show that the work before a Social reformer is very delicate, and that he has obstructive influences in every direction to contend against.

Let us pause here for a moment and consider what is the cause of all this backsliding, of this tendency towards variation between precept and practice. In my humble opinion, the root causes are two:—(1) ambitious ideals, and (2) the position of Hindu women. Now, Social reform, more than any other kind of reform, involves a certain amount of sacrifice, a certain extent of social ostracism, a certain degree of personal inconvenience. The more pronounced is the departure from the ordinary life of the people, the more suffering is the lot of the courageous man who thus seeks to move forward. But are all of us, or at least the majority of us, willing to make that sacrifice, or ready to face that ostracism and inconvenience? I confess, that we are not prepared for them. I am not speaking of the giants. There have been many of them in this ancient land, and I am sure there will be many in the future. To

them social ostracism and inconvenience have been incentives rather than deterrents. Their actions have not been influenced by petty considerations of personal comfort. Men like Goutama, Buddha, Guru Nanak of old: men like Raja Rammohan, Dayanand Sarasvati, Iswarachandra Vidyasagar, and Mahadev Govinda Ranade of more recent times.

But all are not of such stuff as martyrs are made of. The ordinary Hindu is a comfort-loving individual, not averse to progress altogether, but disinclined to take more than a step or two at a time. It is such men that form the majority of Hindu Society, and it is of them that I speak to-day. In the case of such men there is no use their proclaiming their intellectual assent to reforms which they never hope to accomplish in their own family circles. They cannot and should not vote for reforms like widow remarriage and marriage after puberty. As I read the situation, they appear to be reforms which are still far in advance of Hindu Society as we find it to-day even in this district—a district which is reputed to be among the most intellectual in this Presidency. The preacher is not likely to act up to the preaching. In my opinion his preaching and voting on such reforms is a distinct disservice to the cause of reform. When the necessary result of non-performance follows, the enemy of reform is not slow to seize it, to show to the wavering and the ignorant that the reform itself is not good, for, if it were so, he asks, "why this backsliding?" Numerous instances of this sort are likely to act as dampers on the few that are courageous and enthusiastic. I would therefore suggest that the programme of a District Social Conference like this should reflect the opinions of the majority of those composing the Society of the district or be only slightly in advance of it. It may be asked, what is the measure of these opinions? How is one to find out what is far too advanced, and what is sufficiently near? Gentlemen,

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I have one idea to offer though I am sure there are many others quite as good. I think the test is the delegate's willingness to take a pledge on the matter. If a delegate says that marriage after puberty is good, ask him if he is willing to take a pledge not to marry his own daughter before puberty. In most cases you will find that he who was willing to vote on a resolution advocating it, pauses at once. He finds that it is no easy matter to decide, and that not merely his opinions but those of a host of others near and dear to him are concerned. The result in most cases, is, that he is not prepared to take that pledge. Gentlemen, the system of taking pledges deserves much better trial than it has had. I know that for the conscientious and courageous man, no pledge is necessary. I know also that in the case of those who would openly take a pledge only to please others, and who think that conscience is a word that cowards use, no pledge is binding. But they are the few. The average man is not altogether without conscience; nor is he obsessed by it. He has an element of steadfastness in his composition. There is also a grain of vanity in it. He is anxious to be thought well of by his social compeers. He desires not to get the reputation of an unreliable man. For such, I think a pledge is a useful staff to lean on, in times of trial when he has to balance the inconveniences of the reform with its benefits. It keeps him in the straight path. I hope, Gentlemen, those present here will take some pledges at the close of the proceedings to-day. I wish to make it clear that what I have said refers only to those who have not the ability or the courage to face difficulties. It is not my intention to say that all are tarred with the same brush. Nor is it my view that there should be no preaching of reform in advance of the times. Such a thing is necessary if the movement is not to die of

stagnation. What I say is that the preaching should be by those who have put their precept into practice or are prepared to do so immediately. Let the others vote only for such reforms as are within their reach of practice.

All sorts of opinions have been expressed on the position of women in Hindu families. Time was when foreigners who knew little of our family system, and even some Hindus, were of opinion that our women were only, "something better than our dogs, or little dearer than our horses," to use a well known expression of Tennyson. But that school of criticism has ceased to be heard now. The pendulum has, I am afraid, gone to the other end. In our anxiety for extolling our national institutions, we now proclaim that our system is altogether above reproach, that our women are following the highest ideals enjoined by our Shastras, and that their influence in our families is all for the best.

Gentlemen! I agree that the ideal of our Shastras is wide and high enough. No woman need soar higher than Sita, but are our women anywhere near that height to-day? I am afraid not. Centuries of want of education have made their outlook very narrow and unprogressive. I agree that they exercise a considerable amount of influence over us men, but unfortunately it is not always for the best. I recognise that our women are loving mothers—loving not wisely but too well,—and devoted wives. But when questions of departure from ordinary social usages are considered, they thwart you in all those delicate ways which only women know how to employ. Not that the Hindu woman has not got native wit: not that she does not feel the evils which necessitate the change; but she is afraid of any departure from *mamool*. She is afraid of the Indian counterpart of that inexorable individual, Mrs. Grundy. She dare not offend the opinion of her social equals. So, when, as it unhappily happens somewhat often now a days, owing to

our system of marrying girls very young, her daughter becomes a child-widow, she cries herself hoarse over it. For days she will not think of a meal. She will give up for ever even her jewels and new clothes, so dear to the heart of every woman. She will make herself miserable in diverse other ways. But if you suggest to her that the misery of her child can be remedied by her remarriage, the loving mother becomes a heartless woman for the nonce. When her next daughter reaches the years of 7 or 8 she will quietly suggest that a boy should be found to marry her, knowing full well that a later marriage may prevent child widowhood. You may tell her that. You may tell her that boys now a days demand exorbitant amounts to marry her daughter, and that if there is no necessity to marry before puberty, there won't be much pressure. She will smile and seem to agree with what you say. But next day she will return to her charge, none the better for your lecture. Why? Because her neighbour had said the previous evening, "How long are you going to keep your daughter unmarried. Do you propose to celebrate marriage and nuptials together?" The Hindu man is rarely able to withstand such influence, such importunity. It is easy for such as are not troubled with near and dear relatives to say, "Fie on such importunities." But those who are not prepared to cut themselves from their families have either an aged mother or an unregenerate aunt, or worse, a persistent wife to deal with. Such men have to eat the humble pie and forswear their principles by acting against their preaching. I do not criticise them. I feel for them. They are not cowards, as they are usually called by impatient idealists who have no inconvenient ties. They have sacrificed themselves at the altar of duty, duty towards those who gave them birth, duty towards those who brought them up and made men of them, duty towards the mother of their children. It is

difficult to estimate which is the higher duty, duty towards your conscience, or duty towards such as I have spoken of. Some may in theory opine that the former is higher. But in practice the ordinary man votes for the latter.

What then is the remedy? Let us elevate our women. Morally they are already our equals if not our superiors. But open out their intellects and broaden their outlook. There are two ways in which this can be done—Education, and Travel. Gentlemen, it is perhaps unnecessary at this time of the day to discant on the benefits of female education. They are recognised by most of us. Even those few who disagree labour under the impression that education is necessary only for earning bread. Perhaps they will change their view if they realise that education is sure to broaden one's view of Life. The controversy now is only about the *modus operandi*. What shall be the ideal? What the curriculum? To the first question, there can be in the present state of Hindu Society only one answer, and that is that our girls should be fitted for wifehood. There is not likely to be any room in Hindu India in the near future for any female politicians, for the suffergettes and the breakers of noses and windows. Nor are most of our women likely to be thrown on their own resources and be compelled to earn their bread, our family system being what it is. But the curriculum is not so easily settled. I am afraid that except in a few institutions much of the girls' time is being wasted in learning subjects which would be of no practical use to them in later life. Gentlemen, for a long time to come, and till marriage after puberty becomes common, the period of life in which a Hindu girl is likely to find enough time to read, will be between 6 and 12. She has only 6 years to crowd all her scholastic achievements in. How to utilise them best is the problem. In my opinion, her time should not be taken up by numerous subjects, for, then,

though her reading may be wide, the level will be low. I would therefore confine her attention to the study of one language and a little arithmetic. Six years is a sufficiently long period to get a fairly high level of proficiency in one language. With such knowledge she can be left to study what are called "Matter books" in her own home after she grows older. Then she will be able to understand the matter better, having a maturer brain.

Gentlemen, the advantages of travel are well known. In practice, we find that it is the best way to rub off our angularities. It is a great leveller. Men who are exclusive, with a touch-me-not spirit, are willing to extend friendly hands when closeted together in a railway compartment. Men who believe that certain petty *acharams* are the foundations of our religion perceive that they may be good Hindus without worrying themselves on these small points. Transfer the South Indian Brahmin to Bombay. He sees that a man can be a devout Brahmin though he takes his chappaties before a Sudra. If he would go a little further north, he will find that Brahmins in the United Provinces do not lose caste for marrying their daughters after puberty. If he goes a little to the east, he will be shocked to find an orthodox Brahmin eating fish and yet claiming to be as good a Brahmin as he. Even so with our women. It is common experience in Brahmin families that a Benares-returned old lady is more tolerant than her stay-at-home sister—the reason being that she has realised that one can be a good Hindu without attaching great importance to mere ceremonial life. If our women would only travel largely in Maharashtra, they will realise more of the dignity and freedom of womanhood. If they would go to the great cities of Bombay and Calcutta, they would realise that Hindu women could be the intellectual equals and companions of their husbands without losing the innate modesty which is so characteristic of the

Eastern women. Without going even so far as these places, if they would go only as far as Malabar, they would cease to look on marriage after puberty as anything entirely out of the common : for they would find that in Brahmin families leading rigid ceremonial lives, girls are always married after puberty, and that several such girls never marry at all.

Closely connected with the position of our women, perhaps forming the very foundation of it, is our marriage system. Gentlemen, many and varied are the ways that have been suggested to improve it. At one time widow re-marriage was the chief reform discussed. Latterly, it has taken a second rank, and marriage after puberty is running in front. It is considered to be the panacea for all evils arising out of our present system of marriage. I have already stated that these two reforms are not within the range of the practical so far as the large majority of the inhabitants of this District is concerned. They may be good reforms in themselves. Courageous individuals may adopt them, but in view of the principles which I set out some minutes ago, they are not fit subjects for being voted on in this Conference. Another reform talked about occasionally is the prevention of marriages of old men and young girls. But instances of of gay Lotharios of eighty espousing wee bits of brides are fortunately very rare, and the social ridicule with which such marriages are covered, make them rarer still. It is not such a crying evil that we need make it an item of our programme. Of much wider currency and more inimical to progress, both economic and social, is the enormous expenditure now incurred, willingly or unwillingly, on marriages in this District. Several families have been ruined by it. (Sub-Registrars will tell you that with the beginning of the Tamil month Chitrai, their offices are flooded with anxious fathers of girls who either mortgage or sell their few ancestral acres to make brides of their daughters. The evil has assumed

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such proportions that like the Rajputs of the North, Brahmins of this district sometimes begin to mourn when their better halves present them with an inconvenient number of daughters. It may be that the stage of infanticide has not been reached, but most are not over-happy when girl follows girl. The evil calls for urgent remedies. What are they? There are two which in my opinion would touch the sore parts at once. First, the abolition of what is expressively called "Edir Jamin" in Tamil. Next, the curtailment of the period of marriage festivities. The system of "Edir Jamin" or taking money for marrying girls is, as you all know, a recent innovation. On other occasions, and on other platforms much is spoken now a days of the evil effects of English education. I, as an educated Indian, deny that the many charges brought against it are true. But I confess that so far as this system of selling oneself to one's father-in-law for money is concerned, it is a product of English education. Not that education in English necessarily leads to it. The bones of Macaulay would quake in his coffin, if they heard that this is a result of his advocacy of instruction in English. But it is common knowledge that till the University began to mint out B. A.'s, the evil of demanding bounties from fathers of girls was not heard of, in this part of the country. Now their unlettered brethren have taken leaves from the B. A.'s' books and go further. The demand is made not only at the time of the marriage but on all feast days till the bride comes to reside with her husband. The evil is recognised by all but even those who are on principle opposed to it feel themselves helpless. They may not demand money for their sons, but in the case of their daughters they are unable to stand up and say "no." Most often a particular bridegroom is considered to be very eligible from all other points of view. But his father demands money. The choice before the girl's father is between paying the amount demanded and losing a

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good bridegroom who will make his daughter happy through life. In the conflict, the father gives up the principle and pays up the money. If he does not pay cash, he gives it in the shape of gold watches, bicycles and similar presents. It is a misnomer to call them presents because he never contemplated giving them till the demand was made, and because his girl was chosen on the distinct understanding that such presents were to be made. The backsliding is as much there as in the case of those who openly pay cash. A young friend of mine once put the case for the demand thus. "Well sir, you ask me to marry your daughter of 7 or 8 or 9 years of age. Why should I do so? In other countries brides are chosen for their own personal qualifications; but how can I choose your little girl for her own merits. She has no education worth the name. She is too young to have developed any traits of character. I am not sure whether she will at all develop to be a healthy woman. I must choose her not for her merits but for other reasons. You ask me to choose her because her parents are good. But heredity does not invariably make the children as good as their parents. You ask me to choose her because her father is a rich man or a big official. Is that not really choosing her for money? Moreover, if her father dies, under your Hindu law she will be a dependant on somebody even for ordinary expenses. If I am to choose her on adventitious considerations, why should I not choose her for the money I am able to get out of her father. The girl who brings me most money is the best that I can have. The more ready money I get, the better." Now there is an element of truth in what my young friend said. Our marriage system has made it impossible for young men in these days to choose the girl for her own merits, and so long as the system is what it is, I am afraid, the evil cannot be rooted out. Our efforts should therefore be aimed at the

root cause. We must make it possible for our young men to choose girls for their own accomplishments, character and endowments. I think firstly, we must postpone marriage as long as possible to make our girls develop their character. Of course the bar of puberty is present. But there is nothing to prevent us from waiting till as near that time as we can. We must try and educate our girls. If we followed the system which I advocated some time ago, by 12 a girl can attain a high degree of proficiency at least in one language. We must try and change the provisions of the Hindu Law under which a daughter gets nothing of her father's patrimony if she has a brother. So long as the millenium is not reached, monetary considerations will influence the choice of brides to a certain extent in the large majority of cases. It is only a question of degree in each case. Perhaps the thought that she will get a share in large property may prevent a demand for ready cash, and make the marriage a less mercenary affair. In this matter, I think we need not introduce anything novel. The "Mitakshara" provides for a share for the unmarried daughter. It is only some of the recent South Indian authorities that say "no" to her claim. We have only to revert to the older condition of affairs. The reformed councils have opened up a new era of life in this country. They have brought the power to initiate beneficent legislation to the sons of the soil. The large number of seats opened out for them make it easier for them to get the support of the councils for social legislation, which the British Government however beneficent and well meaning, it may be, cannot initiate. May I express a hope that the power would soon be used for removing the wrongs of Hindu women in this matter of division of family property.

Gentlemen, what I have said is only one way of cutting down expenditure. Another which, in my opinion, deserves consideration is the curtailment of the period of marriage

festivities. Among the Tamil Brahmins they last for at least 4 days. The Telugus take 5 days, while if my information is correct, the Madhwas want a whole week. Gentlemen, I think this is a needless prolongation of a simple ceremony. The Shastras do not require it. Much of the ceremonial is meaningless under the present conditions. You are perhaps aware, that according to our Shastras, the ritual of a Hindhu Brahmin's marriage consists of three parts. First, the choice of the bride or gift of the bride to a wandering student. This takes very little time. Then comes the marriage proper when the bride and bridegroom exchange promises, and it is over soon after the "Sapthapathies" are taken. According to the Hindu law as at present administered, the marriage is complete with this; and the whole ceremonial need not take more than a few hours. Next follows that portion of the ritual which I characterised as unnecessary. As soon as the marriage proper is over, the bridegroom must take his bride to his own house. He may have to cross rivers and travel in carts and boats. There are several mantras which he has to utter if he has to do so, and when he enters his own house. All these are now muttered without the bridegroom even crossing the gates of the bride's house. The Shastras then enjoin that the bride and bridegroom should be continent for 3 days, and then perform a Homam, and begin conjugal life. Most Smriti writers ordain sexual congress on the 4th day. The others are silent. This means that but for the injunction, the parties are fit for sexual congress. Is it not ridiculous to ask the husband of an immature girl not to approach her for 3 nights. "Cessant ratione Legis, Cessant ipsa lex" is a well-known maxim. When the reason of the law ceases to exist, the law also goes with it. Even so, when the very necessity for the law ceases. I think this is eminently a case of that sort. It is unnecessary now to follow that injunction. It is impossible to act otherwise.

It is therefore needless to postpone what is called "Sesha Homam" till the fourth day, if it is necessary to perform it at all. That being so, I think there is no need to prolong the marriage ceremony for more than a few hours. If this view is adopted, I think much unnecessary expenditure consequent on the marriage continuing for at least 4 days, can be curtailed. This reform has one argument in its favour more than others, and it is a telling argument in the case of an ordinary man, *viz.*, it stops a portion of the drain on his resources. The Shastras are not against it. He need not fear the wrath of the Priest and the Pandit.

I was speaking some time ago of the pernicious system of bridegrooms demanding money. One of the reasons, if not the chief among them, why this practice has come into vogue at all, and why even those who realise its evil effects have to submit to it is the paucity of suitable bridegrooms, caused by the narrowness of the field of selection. The bridegroom has according to current usage to be chosen from among those belonging to the bride's sub-sect. There is no Shastraic authority for it. Our lawgivers only ask us to marry within our *caste*. What they mean by caste is one of the four broad divisions. I do not think they even contemplated sub-castes, except in cases of the children of parents, one of whom belongs to one of the four castes and another to a superior or inferior one among those four. So far as I know, and I have consulted learned pandits in the matter, there is no mention anywhere in the books which we hold sacred of the thousand and one small and exclusive sects into which our Society is now divided. They seem to be due to geographical groupings and consequent exclusiveness in times when travelling was difficult. Perhaps they represent various groups of immigrants from the north who came in different times. In the case of Gurukkals, the explanation of the inferior position

they occupy seems to be that they took to worship of idols which the learned Brahmins who followed the *Gnana Marga* viewed as a low form of worship. Except that one sub-sect, the other sub-sects of the Brahmins are to-day considered equals in social status. Why they should not intermarry is not clear. There is of course the fact that in practice they have not done so for some centuries; but the times necessitate a change, and there is no rational or shastraic objection to it. The movement may first begin with Brahmins who speak the same vernacular and follow the same sub-division of our faith, and it will be time enough when that is accomplished to advocate that the same may be extended to those who speak different languages or follow different faiths, for in the latter case there are more difficulties. Even in those cases, I would advocate the practice of interdining as a preliminary step towards that consummation. Though the Hindu ideal is not that of Omakhayyam when he said :—

"All till the cup—what boots it to repeat ;
How Time is slipping underneath our feet :
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday ;
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet."

Though a true Hindu considers even his eating and drinking as offerings to the Almighty, in practice a Hindu's view of eating is not so etherial and social relations are improved and social confidences more easily established by constant dining together. Such interdining will remove many of the misconceptions which keep the sub-sects aloof, will lessen the misunderstandings between them, and will promote greater solidarity amongst the members of the four great castes. In fact our shastras seem to contemplate interdining between even the four great castes also. There is no mention in the earlier shastras of what is called "*Drishtidosham*," i.e., the defect of a person of lower caste seeing you take your meals. In the

Bombay Presidency, even learned and orthodox Brahmins freely dine in the presence of other castes. If owing to the peculiarities of the situation in this Presidency such a thing is not practicable now, there can be no reasonable objection to at least Iyengars and Smarthas and Madhwas among Brahmins and similar sub-sects amongst the other castes dining together. At one time, I was of opinion that this reform was fairly in the way of being accomplished soon. But recently there has been a wave of pseudo-religion passing over our educated brethren, and incorrect ideas of personal magnetism and influences of that sort have got hold of them. The result is that I find that a large number of them are taking to "*Paranna Niyamam*" and refuse to dine even with old friends. The Iyengars are the worst sinners in this respect, and English education does not seem to effect any change in them as regards this matter.

The next item in our programme is foreign travel. There was once a controversy as to whether our shastras regarded foreign travel as a prohibited thing or not. The orthodox party treated it as a sin beyond all redemption. Even they have latterly given up their attitude of absolute *non-possumus*. There will always be a few in the community who think that *prayaschittam* is a thing undergone for the benefit of the sinner's soul only, and that even the performance of *prayaschittam* does not redeem the sinner and make him fit for social intercourse with *Sishtas*. But they are very few. A large majority of the orthodox party are now willing to take a member of their own caste who has crossed the seas into their community on two conditions *viz.*, that he performs a *prayaschittam*, and that he conforms to the ordinary rules and usages of the caste after his return. Even the *prayaschittam* is not very much insisted on. But they insist on the latter condition. Now Gentleman, unless the person who has returned from a foreign land is willing to give up his

outlandish ways, there is no chance of his getting into the community again. If he will continue to interdine with other castes, if he will continue to take forbidden food, if he would not conform to certain well recognised practices of his caste, I think the caste may be well excused if it refuses to extend its privileges to one who does not care to please it. It may be said that his foreign education has opened his eyes and he views these restrictions as injurious, and that he cannot sacrifice his conscience for his comforts. Well and good, let him satisfy his conscience. Then he must logically let others do what their conscience tells them to be right, viz., follow their caste rules which enjoin them to refuse to extend to him the privileges of their caste. The matter is essentially one of compromise. The question is how far is one willing to have his views and actions controlled by his castemen. If he says, "foreign travel is very useful, so you must give up certain caste rules for me," the question becomes a different one. How far are the particular rules necessary or less beneficial than foreign travel? That opens a wide field of enquiry, and as my time is short, I do not wish to state more than that, in my opinion, the large majority of caste rules as regards drink, food and association with others are not only not injurious but are very beneficial and necessary for the progress of mankind towards that higher spiritual life which is the goal of every true Hindu. In this connection, I would say a few words about the ways of some among the young followers of the Reform movement. They seem to fancy that open defiance of all caste rules denotes an independent mind. In my view, it shows an ill-balanced mind. An orthodox friend of mine whom I was trying to convert for the cause of reform once told me in his caustic manner, "What sir, what is your reform movement? It seems to consist in cropping your hair, giving up your *Sandhyavandanam*

and *Srardham*, eating all sorts of food in refreshment rooms, giving up your castemark, smoking cigars, and leading a thoroughly irreligious life; but doing nothing substantial." There is, I confess, just a grain of truth in what my friend said. The description unfortunately applies to some among the rank and file. But I think most of the leaders are alright now, though at one time some of them shocked their followers by their outlandish ways. I would appeal to those who have the cause of reform at heart not to give room for such criticism. It may be asked by the enthusiast, "Am I to be controlled even as to how I crop my hair or what *namam* I put on?" I will tell him that he must not get restive. If he really wants the cause which he has at heart to progress, he must try and please the community which he tries to reform. If he would not give up his fancies in such unimportant matters, he is not fit for the position of leader and reformer he assumes. I would appeal to him to conform to the little but unobjectionable ways of the community, and he will find that he then has more influence for good over it than those who fly at its face. One incident will illustrate this. There is a distinguished man in Madras at whose feet I had the privilege of sitting as a pupil for half a dozen years. You all know him. There is none in India to-day greater than he in point of character, learning, and spontaneous enthusiasm for public work. He is a Hindu to the "core of his heart," and he entertained an England-returned patriot at dinner. There were some murmurings among the orthodox, some attempt to keep aloof. But his well known love for the Hindu religion, his anxiety to conform to the ways of the community in other matters smashed the opposition, and even less courageous men were induced to follow his example.

The last item in your agenda paper is the amelioration

of the depressed classes. It is a commonplace to say that no question is purely a social question or a political question, or an economic question, as the activities and needs of a community are so connected together that progress in one direction alone is not possible or beneficial. I think this question illustrates that view better than any other. The subject has come up for consideration only recently ; but owing to its great importance has rightly got into the front rank at a bound. Gentlemen, in my opinion, it is the most serious of all problems which we have to consider to-day. On the right solution of it depends much of the future of our Society. For ages we have been treating the Pariahs and Pallas worse than our dogs and pigs. There are streets where dogs and pigs can pass freely along, but a Pariah, however clean he may be, cannot set his foot on. I am not drawing on my imagination. I myself just now happen to live in one such. How long will the higher castes be allowed to continue to treat them? Even the worm will turn is the proverb. I am afraid it is already beginning to show signs of turning. What will be the result if it does? The first to suffer will be the Brahmin who is most contemptuous towards these unfortunate men. In this District, most of the cultivators of lands are Pariahs. Fancy for a moment their striking work, or emigrating in large numbers. What will be the fate of their landlords? The non-Brahmins may be able to take to the cultivation themselves; being more used to hard labour than the thoroughly stay-at-home Brahmin landlord. He it is that will find himself thoroughly helpless. He cannot plough and sow his lands himself, and the other castes are not likely to help him. It is therefore to his best interests that he should take up the question before matters turn much worse. There are other reasons based on humanity, on public good, why he should do so. Gentlemen, no body wants the high caste-

man to hug the pariah in his arms at once. None asks the proud Brahmin to dine with him. None wants him to take the Pariah to his *Sanctum Sanctorum* at once. My appeal is that as a first step, "begin to treat him as a human being." "அரிதரித மாணிடப் பிழை யரித" said the great Saint. Give the Pariah who has attained that birth, the privileges you accord to dogs, pigs and horses. Let him pass along the streets freely just as they do. Let not the Brahmin returning after perjuring himself in Court cry out to him to get to the corner of the street to let him pass on. Gentlemen, the mighty British Government has made him your equal in all matters of public rights. With the strength which those rights give him, with the aid of foreign missionary agencies who find an easy field among his class to make conversions, he will force your citadel ere long. Let us take time by the forelock and yield to him gracefully, what he is likely to force you to give him, viz., equality of opportunities. No body can by a stroke of the pen or in a few years make the Pariah the intellectual equal of the Brahmin. But there is nothing to prevent the Government from placing Pariahs in places of position. What will be your fate then? How would you feel if he asks you to keep aloof from him, not to enter certain streets, to keep out of the witness box lest you should contaminate it. Just one word about what I said last. A gentlemen of the Bombay judicial service recently wrote to the "Indian Social Reformer" complaining that low caste persons were not treated equally with other castes in Courts. Another officer indignantly protested against it as casting a reflection on the Service. I am afraid that the complaint is too true. When a Pariah witness is called, he is in several places asked to stand at a distance from the witness box and made to give evidence from there. It may be that the attention of the presiding Judge is not drawn to the place where he stands. It may be that the

difference is not intentionally made, but that the witness himself, out of delicacy for the feelings of his social superiors, stands at a distance. The result is however the same, the Pariah is treated as some one who is likely to defile the witness-box, as some one of inferior status. I think the system should be put an end to at once. Gentlemen, especially the Brahmins amongst you, we have a grave responsibility in the matter. Let us bestir ourselves and make these unfortunate men our friends and allies. Let us try and educate them. Let us make them cleaner. Let us make them realise their manhood. Above all, let us cease to look on them with contempt. Let us love them. Ours is a religion of love. Ours is a religion of brotherhood. "He who loveth not the man whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen." So long as we do not do this, we have no voice to complain that other races, in other places, treat even the highest of us as helots. I have often thought that that was due to our past attitude towards these low classes. Let us do better in this generation. Some fear that if the Pariah is educated, he will turn unruly and would cease to work. That is the old argument in favour of slavery. But can you prevent education reaching him? You can do that no more than you can order the wind not to blow towards his habitation. If you won't educate him, there are others who would do it for other purposes. If your fear is well founded, he will turn against you with greater force as one who kept him ignorant out of selfish motives. If you educate him, that sense of gratitude for which the Indian is famous, will keep him from turning against you. Gentlemen, there is one particular reason why we in Tanjore should love the pariah. Nandan the Great Soul who showed us the possibilities of a Pariah, who showed us that high spirituality is not the preserve of the Brahmin and is not bound by rules of caste was a native of our district. Who knows that among the millions

who toil in our fields that there are not many "mute-
inglorious" Nandans waiting for opportunities for evolution.

Gentlemen ! I have said nearly all that I have to say. I have spoken only about those reforms which are to be discussed by you to-day. I have not considered it necessary to discuss the others, for we are not going to take any practical action as regards them. The movement which is represented by this Conference is a holy movement. It is fraught with the highest possibilities, and will confer the highest benefits on the community of which we are all proud to be members. As far as my imagination can reach, the movement must continue to be a Hindu movement guided by Hindus who are proud of their religion, working for Hindu ideals, and leading to the highest of all Hindu goals,—Moksha. We may borrow from the non-Hindu his methods of missionary work; we may consult him on points of tactics. But our ideals must always be Hindu ideals ; Our goal, the goal of Hindu civilization. That civilization is not, as is commonly believed, against advancement in material conditions. It may be that for the highest, it enjoins complete separation from the mundane world. But the *Grihasta*, the householder, is its backbone—the householder who is to look after the comforts of the student *Brahmachari*, and the self-denying *Sannyasi*. The *Grihasta* is allowed, nay, enjoined to increase his wealth for the benefit of those whom he has to support. I mention this in answer to those who say that that civilization is dead and effete, and is unfit for modern life. If the be-all and end-all of modern life is the making of money, well, Hindu civilization will certainly not endorse it or help it. But I think even in the more material West the best minds regard the acquisition of wealth only as a means to Higher life. "Pl. living and high thinking" is as much a high ideal in the West as in the East.

Working towards that ideal, we will find that it is not

easy to take rapid strides immediately. We have not got a clean slate to write upon. Nor can "you and I with fate conspire, to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, shatter it to bits, and then remould it to our heart's desire." Our ways are crossed by weeds which will stay our march. But, Gentlemen, opposition is the very breath of a true reformer's nostrils. It is his incentive to noble action. It is his opportunity. Let us therefore take up the work in earnest. We may not hurry up. But we must not sit idle either. The country to which we belong is entitled to the best that is in us. Our ancestors have given their best to it. Shall we her modern sons be untrue to our ancestry? It does not matter that we make a few mistakes. Sarojini, the most gifted of India's modern daughters, cried to Mother India :—

"O young, through all thy immemorial years !
Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,
And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,
Beget new glories from thine ageless womb !
The nations that in fettered darkness weep
Crave thee to lead them where great mornings
break.....

Mother, O Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep ?
Arise and answer for thy children's sake !

Thy future calls thee with a manifold sound
To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast.
Waken, O slumbering Mother and be crowned,
Who once wert empress of the sovereign Past."

Let us assist our dear Mother in her awakening.

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