

THE
COLLECTED
WORKS
OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

VOLUME THIRTY-FIVE



THE PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

THE
COLLECTED
WORKS
OF
MAHATMA
GANDHI

XXXV
(1927-1928)

CWMG - XXXV



conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians—not even a Plymouth Brother—not even the most fanatical Mussalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds, because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position, I know, —but to others, not to me!

The Ceylon Daily News, 17-11-1927 and Young India, 22-12-1927

179. SPEECH TO LABOUR UNION, COLOMBO

November 16, 1927

MR. CHAIRMAN, FRIENDS AND FELLOW-LABOURERS,

I thank you for presenting me with your beautiful address and handsome purse for the cause which has brought me to this pearl amongst the islands of the earth. I have called myself a labourer in addressing you as fellow-labourers and I have done so for the simple reason that since 1904 I have been endeavouring to live to the best of my ability as a labourer myself. But long before that date I began to understand and appreciate the dignity of labour and it was long before that date that I realized at the same time that labour was not receiving its due. And out of His infinite grace, God so fashioned my life that I began to be drawn closer and closer to labour and to its service. It, therefore, gives me great joy to be in your midst and to receive from fellow labourers an address and also a purse on behalf of those who are, materially speaking, infinitely worse off than yourselves. The use made by you in your address of the expression "Mother India" has touched me to my deepest recesses. The use of that expression derives great significance to me because I know all of you are not Indians. Perhaps to those of you—and you are in a majority in this Union or these Unions, so far as I understand—and, as I said, to all those of you who are not Indians, the significance that I attach to that expression and which I shall presently explain to you was not before your mind's eye when you made use of the expression. Legend—and legend at times is superior to history—legend has it that in remote times a king called Rama came to Lanka to rid this island of an evil king, and instead of exercising the rights of conquest by annexing this

fair island to India, he restored it to Vibhishana, the brother of that evil king, and crowned him King of Lanka.

Rendered in modern language, it means that Rama, before trying the loyalty of the people of Lanka or the loyalty of King Vibhishana and putting either him or the people through a course of tutelage, gave them straightway complete self-government or dominion status. Many changes have taken place since that date, assigned to the period of this legend, in this place as also in India, and they have undergone many vicissitudes of fortune, but the fact remains that the millions in India, even to the present day, believe in this legend more firmly than in any facts of history. And if you, people of this beautiful island, are not ashamed of owning some connection with your next-door neighbour I would advise you and ask you to share the pride that millions of Indians have in owning this legend. And now you can understand why I told you that you, in my opinion a daughter State, in using the expression "Mother India" for India, had done well in expressing your allegiance to that country.

I would also point out that whether Rama of the legend ever lived on this earth or not, and whether also the ten-headed Ravana of the legend lived in Lanka or not, it is true that there is a Rama who is living today and there is also a Ravana who is living today. Rama is the sweet and sacred name in Hinduism for God and Ravana is the name given in Hindu mythology to evil, whenever evil becomes embodied in the human frame. And it is the business, the function, of the God Rama to destroy evil wherever it occurs and it is equally the function of the God Rama to give to his devotees like Vibhishana a free charter of irrevocable self-government.

Let us all, whether we are labourers or otherwise, seek by ridding ourselves by the help of God Rama within us, of the ten-headed monster of evil within us, and ask for the charter of self-government. And you fellow-labourers who have still to receive your due are perhaps in greater need of Rama's help and Rama's grace in order that you might rid yourselves of evil and fit yourselves for self-government. Don't believe it if anyone tells you that it was I who secured the comparative freedom for the indentured labourers of South Africa or that it was I who secured freedom to the labourers of Ahmedabad or Malabar. They secured whatever they did because they complied with the rules, the inexorable rules, governing a self-government. They won because they helped themselves. And let me briefly tell you what in my opinion you should do to come to your own. Combination amongst

yourselves in the form of unions is undoubtedly the first step. But I can tell you from experience that your very Union can become one of the causes of your bondage if you do not comply with other conditions which I shall presently mention to you. You should consider every one of you a trustee for the welfare of the rest of your fellow-labourers and not be self-seeking. You must live and remain non-violent under circumstances however grave and provoking. If you will be men and realize your dignity as such, you must give up drink in its entirety if you are given to that cursed habit. A man under the influence of drink becomes worse than a beast and forgets the distinction between his sister, his mother and his wife. And if you really believe me as your friend you will take the advice of this old friend of yours and shun drink as you would shun a snake hissing in front of you. A snake can only destroy the body but the curse of drink corrupts the soul within. This, therefore, is much more to be feared and avoided than a snake. You should also avoid gambling if you are given to that evil habit.

There is a still more delicate thing about which I was pained to receive a letter only yesterday or today from a friend who has given his signature. He tells me that the personal purity amongst labourers is somewhat conspicuous by its absence. He tells me that many of you, men and women, huddle yourselves together in small spaces irrespective of any restriction that modesty imposes upon us and demands from us. One of the things that sharply distinguishes a man from a beast is that man from his earliest age has recognized the sanctity of the marriage bond and regulated his life in connection with woman by way of self-restraint which he has more and more imposed upon himself.

My dear friends, if you will realize your dignity as men and rise to your full height, as you ought to, you will bear this little thing in mind that I have told you, treasure it and give effect to it from this very night. If your means do not permit you to have separate and sufficient habitations so as to observe the laws of primary decency, you will refuse to serve under such degrading conditions and for such insufficient wages. I would honour you as brave men if you will accept a state of utter starvation rather than that you should labour on such insufficient wages as would render it impossible for you to observe the primary laws of morality. I do not care whether you are Hindus, or whether you call yourselves Buddhists, or whether you are Christian or Mussalman, the demand of religion is the same and inexorable

that every woman other than your wife must be treated by you as your sister or your mother, whose body must be held as sacred as your own. I would advise you to use your Union as much for internal reformation as for defence against the assaults from without, and remember that while it is quite proper to insist upon your rights and privileges it is imperative that you should recognize the obligation that every right carries with it.

While therefore you will insist upon adequate wage, proper humane treatment from your employers and proper and good sanitary lodgings, you will also recognize that you should treat the business of your employers as if it was your own business and give to it honest and undivided attention. You must on no account neglect your children but you should give them decent education and bring them up properly so that they may be able, when they grow up, to play their parts on the human stage nobly and well.

Lastly, while you have done well in thinking of the unfortunate millions in India I would advise you to establish a living bond between them and yourselves, especially if you still consider that India is the Mother State, the Mother Country; you will for the sake of the few millions invest every pie or every cent that you may want to use for dress in khadi and nothing else. I thank you once more for your address and your purse and for the patient attention with which you have listened to the few words I have said to you this evening. I also thank your volunteers who have been silently and unselfishly serving me to the best of their ability and showing me very delicate attention; although I did not acknowledge their service before, the matter did not escape my attention. I hope and pray that the words I have spoken to you this evening will enter your hearts and God will give you the wisdom and the strength to carry out such advice as may commend itself to you.

The Ceylon Daily News, 17-11-1927