

# Ruskin UNTO THIS LAST

A paraphrase

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Printed & Published by :

Jitendra T Desai

Navajivan Publishing House

Ahmedabad 380 014 (INDIA)

### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In a chapter in his *Autobiography* (Part IV, Chapter XVIII) entitled 'The Magic Spell of a Book' Gandhiji tells us how he read Ruskin's *Unto This Last* on the twenty-four hours' journey from Johannesburg to Durban. 'The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.... I translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodaya*.'

*Sarvodaya* is here re-translated into English, Ruskin's winged words being retained as far as possible.

At the end of that chapter Gandhiji gives us a summary of the teachings of *Unto This Last* as he understood it:

1. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. A life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Nothing more need be said as regards the paraphrase of Ruskin's four chapters, but Gandhiji's conclusion (pp. 77-80), written as it was in South Africa long before he returned to India in 1915, is prophetic and fit to be treasured by India for all time to come. And the last paragraph of the booklet is a pearl beyond price.

V G. D.

2007, Bhadra vadi 5

**[SECOND EDITION]**

This is a reprint of the first edition except for a few verbal alterations suggested by my friend Shri Verrier Elwin who was good enough to go through the translation at my request.

V G. D.

*Vasantapanchami, 2012*

## INTRODUCTION

People in the West generally hold that the whole duty of man is to promote the happiness of the majority of mankind, and happiness is supposed to mean only physical happiness and economic prosperity. If the laws of morality are broken in the conquest of this happiness, it does not matter very much. Again, as the object sought to be attained is the happiness of the majority, Westerners do not think there is any harm if this is secured by sacrificing a minority. The consequences of this line of thinking are writ large on the face of Europe.

This exclusive search for physical and economic well-being prosecuted in disregard of morality is contrary to divine law, as some wise men in the West have shown. One of these was John Ruskin who contends in *Unto This Last* that men can be happy only if they obey the moral law.

We in India are very much given nowadays to an imitation of the West. It is necessary to imitate the virtues of the West, but there is no doubt that Western standards are often bad, and every one will agree that we should shun all evil things.

The Indians in South Africa are reduced to a sorry plight. We go abroad in order to make money, and in trying to get rich quick, we lose sight of morality and forget that God will judge all our acts. Self-interest absorbs our energies and paralyzes our power of discrimination between good and evil. The result is that instead of gaining anything, we lose a great deal by staying in foreign countries; or at least we fail to derive full benefit from it. Morality is an essential ingredient in all the faiths of the world, but apart from religion, our common sense indicates the necessity of observing the moral law. Only by observing it can we hope to be happy, as Ruskin shows in the following pages.

Socrates in Plato's *Apology*<sup>1</sup> gives us some idea of our duty as men. And he was as good as his word. I feel that Ruskin's *Unto This Last* is an expansion of Socrates' ideas; he tells us how men in various walks of life should behave if they intend to translate these ideas into action. What follows is not a

translation of *Unto This Last* but a paraphrase, as a translation would not be particularly useful to the readers of *Indian Opinion*. Even the title has not been translated but paraphrased as *Sarvodaya* [the welfare of all], as that was what Ruskin aimed at in writing this book.

<sup>1</sup> *Gandhiji had published a summary of The Apology in Indian Opinion before Sarvodaya was written.*

V G. D.

## 01. THE ROOTS OF TRUTH

Among the delusions which at different periods have afflicted mankind, perhaps the greatest—certainly the least creditable—is modern economics based on the idea that an advantageous code of action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection.

Of course, as in the case of other delusions, political economy has a plausible idea at the root of it. 'The social affections,' says the economist, 'are accidental and disturbing elements in human nature; but avarice and the desire for progress are constant elements. Let us eliminate the inconstant, and considering man merely as a money-making machine, examine by what laws of labour, purchase and sale, the greatest amount of wealth can be accumulated. Those laws once determined, it will be for each individual afterwards to introduce as much of the disturbing affectionate element as he chooses.'

This would be a logical method of analysis if the accidentals afterwards to be introduced were of the same nature as the powers first examined. Supposing a body in motion to be influenced by constant and inconstant forces, it is the simplest way of examining its course to trace it first under the persistent conditions and afterwards introduce the causes of variation. But the disturbing elements in the social problem are not of the same nature as the constant ones; they alter the essence of the creature under examination the moment they are added. They operate not mathematically but chemically, introducing conditions which render all our previous knowledge unavailable.

I do not doubt the conclusions of the science if its terms are accepted. I am simply uninterested in them, as I should be in those of a science of gymnastics which assumed that men had no skeletons. It might be shown on that supposition that it would be advantageous to roll the students up into pellets, flatten them into cakes, or stretch them into cables; and that when these results were effected, the reinsertion of the skeleton would be attended with various inconveniences to their constitution. The reasoning might be admirable,

the conclusions true, and the science deficient only in applicability. Modern political economy stands on a precisely similar basis. It imagines that man has a body but no soul to be taken into account and frames its laws accordingly. How can such laws possibly apply to man in whom the soul is the predominant element?

Political economy is no science at all. We see how helpless it is when labourers go on a strike. The masters take one view of the matter, the operatives another; and no political economy can set them at one. Disputant after disputant vainly strives to show that the interests of the masters are not antagonistic to those of the men. In fact it does not always follow that the persons must be antagonistic because their interests are. If there is only a crust of bread in the house, and mother and children are starving, their interests are not the same. If the mother eats it, the children want it; if the children eat it, the mother must go hungry to her work. Yet it does not follow that there is antagonism between them, that they will fight for the crust, and the mother, being strongest, will get it and eat it. Similarly it cannot be assumed that because their interests are diverse, persons must regard one another with hostility and use violence or cunning to obtain the advantage.

Even if we consider men as actuated by no other moral influences than those which affect rats or swine, it can never be shown generally either that the interest of master and labourer are alike or that they are opposed; for according to circumstances they may be either. It is indeed the interest of both that the work should be rightly done and a just price obtained for it but in the division of profits, the gain of the one may or may not be the loss of the other. It is not the master's interest to pay wages so low as to leave the men sickly and depressed, nor the workman's interest to be paid high wages if the smallness of the master's profit hinders him from conducting it in a safe and liberal way. A stoker ought not to desire high pay if the company is too poor to keep the engine-wheels in repair.

All endeavour, therefore, to deduce rules of action from balance of expediency is in vain. And it is meant to be in vain. For no human actions ever were

intended by the Maker of men to be guided by balances of expediency but by balances of justice. He has therefore rendered all endeavours to determine expediency futile •for evermore. No man can know what will be the ultimate result to himself or others of any given line of conduct. But every man may know and most of us do know what is a just and an unjust act. And all of us may know also that the consequences of justice will be ultimately the best possible, both to others and ourselves, though we can neither say what *is* best, or how it is likely to come about.

I have meant in the term justice to include affection—such affection as one man owes to another. All right relations between master and operative ultimately depend on this.

As an illustration let us consider the position of domestic servants.

We will suppose that the master of a household tries only to get as much work out of his servants as he can, at the rate of wages he gives. He never allows them to be idle; feeds them as poorly and lodges them as ill as they will endure. In doing this, there is no violation on his part of what is commonly called 'justice'. He agrees with the domestic for his whole time and service and takes them, the limits of hardship in treatment being fixed by the practice of other masters in the neighbourhood. If the servant can get a better place, he is free to take one.

This is the politico-economical view of the case according to the doctors of that science who assert that by this procedure the greatest average of work will be obtained from the servant, and therefore the greatest benefit to the community, and through the community, to the servant himself.

That however is not so. It would be so if the servant were an engine of which the motive power was steam, magnetism or some such agent of calculable force. But on the contrary he is an engine whose motive power is the Soul. Soul force enters into all the economist's equations without his knowledge and falsifies every one of their results. The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay or under pressure. It will be done when the

motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel, namely by the affections.

It does happen often that if the master is a man of sense and energy, much material work may be done under pressure; also it does happen often that if the master is indolent and weak, a small quantity of work, and that bad, may be produced by his servant. But the universal law of the matter is that, assuming any given quantity of energy and sense in master and servant, the greatest material result obtainable by them will be not through antagonism to each other, but through affection for each other.

Nor is this one whit less generally true because indulgence will be frequently abused, and kindness met with ingratitude. For the servant who, gently treated, is ungrateful, treated urgently, will be revengeful; and the man who is dishonest to a liberal master will be injurious to an unjust man.

In any case and with any person, this unselfish treatment will produce the most effective return. I am here considering the affections wholly as a motive power; not at all as things in themselves desirable or noble. I look at them simply as an anomalous force, rendering every one of the ordinary economist's calculations nugatory. The affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of economics. Treat the servant kindly with the idea of turning his gratitude to account, and you will get, as you deserve, no gratitude nor any value for your kindness; but treat him kindly without any economical purpose, and all economical purposes will be answered; here as elsewhere whoever will save his life shall lose it, whoso loses it shall find it.

The next simplest example of relation between master and operative is that which exists between the commander of a regiment and his men.

Supposing the officer only desires to apply the rules of discipline so as, with least trouble to himself to make the regiment most effective, he will not be able, by any rules, on this selfish principle, to develop the full strength of his subordinates. But if he has the most direct personal relations with his men, the

most care for their interests, and the most value for their lives, he will develop their effective strength, through their affection for his own person and trust in his character, to a degree wholly unattainable by other means. This applies more stringently as the numbers concerned are larger: a charge may often be successful though the men dislike their officers; a battle has rarely been won, unless they loved their general.

A body of men associated for the purposes of robbery (as a Highland clan in ancient times) shall be animated by perfect affection, and every member of it be ready to lay down his life for the life of his chief. But a band of men associated for purposes of legal production is usually animated by no such emotions, and none of them is willing to give his life for the life of his chief. For a servant or a soldier is engaged at a definite rate of wages for a definite period; but a workman at a rate of wages variable according to the demand for labour, and with the risk of being at any time thrown out of employment by chances of trade. Now as under these conditions no action of the affections can take place, but only an explosive action of *disaffections*, two points offer themselves for consideration in the matter:

1. How far the rate of wages may be so regulated as not to vary with the demand for labour;
  2. How far it is possible that bodies of workmen may be engaged and maintained at such fixed rate of wages (whatever the state of trade may be), without enlarging or diminishing their number, so as to give them permanent interest in the establishment with which they are connected, like that of the domestic servants in an old family, or an *esprit de corps*, like that of the soldiers in a crack regiment.
1. A curious fact in the history of human error is the denial by the economist of the possibility of so regulating wages as not to vary with the demand for labour.

We do not sell our prime-minister by Dutch auction. Sick, we do not inquire for a physician who takes less than a guinea; litigious, we never think of reducing six-and-eight pence to four-and-sixpence; caught in a

shower we do not canvass the cabmen to find one who values his driving at less than sixpence a mile.

The best labour always has been, and is, as all labour ought to be, paid by an invariable standard.

'What!' the reader perhaps answers amazedly: 'to pay good and bad workmen alike?'

Certainly. You pay with equal fee, contentedly, the good and bad preachers (workmen upon your soul) and the good and bad physicians (workmen upon your body); much more may you pay, contentedly, with equal fees, the good and bad workmen upon your house.

'Nay, but I choose my physician, thus indicating my sense of the quality of their work.' By all means choose your bricklayer; that is the proper reward of the good workman, to be 'chosen'. The right system respecting all labour is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate, but the good workman employed, and the bad workman unemployed. The false system is when the bad workman is allowed to offer his work at half-price, and either take the place of the good or to force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum.

2. This equality of wages, then, being the first object towards which we have to discover the road, the second is that of maintaining constant numbers of workmen in employment, whatever may be the accidental demand for the article they produce.

The wages which enable any workman to live are necessarily higher if his work is liable to intermission, than if it is assured and continuous. In the latter case he will take low wages in the form of a fixed salary. The provision of regular labour for the workman is good for him as well as for his master in the long run, although he cannot then make large profits or take big risks or indulge in gambling.

The soldier is ready to lay down his life for his chief and therefore he is held in greater honour than an ordinary workman. Really speaking, the soldier's trade

is not slaying, but being slain in the defence of others. The reason the world honours the soldier is, because he holds his life at the service of the State.

Not less is the respect we pay to the lawyer, physician and clergyman, founded ultimately on their self-sacrifice. Set in a judge's seat, the lawyer will strive to judge justly, come of it what may. The physician will treat his patients with care, no matter under what difficulties. The clergyman will similarly instruct his congregation and direct it to the right path.

All the efficient members of these so-called learned professions are in public estimate of honour preferred before the head of a commercial firm, as the merchant is presumed to act always selfishly. His work may be very necessary to the community; but the motive of it is understood to be wholly personal. The merchant's first object in all his dealings must be (the public believe) to get as much for himself and leave as little to his customer as possible. Enforcing this upon him, by political statute, as the necessary principle of his action; recommending it to him, and themselves reciprocally adopting it, proclaiming for law of the universe that a buyer's function is to cheapen, and a seller's to cheat, - the public, nevertheless, involuntarily condemn the man of commerce for his compliance with their own statement, and stamp him forever as belonging to an inferior grade of human personality.

This they must give up doing. They will have to discover a kind of commerce which is not exclusively selfish. Or rather they must discover that there never was or can be any other kind of commerce; and that this which they have called commerce was not commerce at all but cozening. In true commerce, as in true preaching or true fighting, it is necessary to admit the idea of occasional voluntary loss;—that sixpences have to be lost, as well as lives, under a sense of duty; that the market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit; and trade its heroism as well as war.

Five great intellectual professions exist in every civilized nation:

The Soldier's profession is to *defend* it.

The Pastor's to *teach* it.

The Physician's to *keep it in health*.

The Lawyer's to *enforce justice* in it.

The Merchant's to *provide* for it.

And the duty of all these men is on due occasion to *die* for it. For truly the man who does not know when to die does not know how to live.

Observe, the merchant's function is to provide for the nation. It is no more his function to get profit for himself out of that provision than it is a clergyman's function to get his stipend. This stipend is a necessary adjunct but not the object of his life if he be a true clergyman, any more than his fee (or honorarium) is the object of life to a true physician. Neither is his fee the object of life to a true merchant. All three, if true men, have a work to be done irrespective of fee—to be done even at any cost, or for quite the contrary of fee; the pastor's function being to teach, the physician's to heal and the merchant's to provide. That is to say, he has to apply all his sagacity and energy to the producing the thing he deals in perfect state and distributing it at the cheapest possible price where it is most needed.

And because the production of any commodity involves the agency of many lives and hands, the merchant becomes in the course of his business the master and governor of large masses of men in a more direct way than a military officer or pastor, so that on him falls, in great part, the responsibility for the kind of life they lead; and it becomes his duty not only to produce goods in the purest and cheapest forms, but also to make the various employments involved in the production most beneficial to the men employed.

And as into these two functions, requiring for their right exercise the highest intelligence as well as patience, kindness and tact, the merchant is bound to put all his energy, so for their just discharge he is bound, as soldier or physician is bound, to give up, if need be, his life, in such way as it may be demanded of him.

Two main points he has to maintain: first his engagements; and secondly the perfectness and purity of the thing provided by him; so that rather than fail in

any engagement or consent to any deterioration, adulteration, or unjust or exorbitant price of that which he provides, he is bound to meet fearlessly any form of distress, poverty or labour which may through maintenance of these points come upon him.

Again in his office as governor of the 'men employed by him, the merchant is invested with a paternal authority and responsibility. In most cases a youth entering a commercial establishment is withdrawn altogether from home influence; his master must become his father; else he has, for practical and constant help, no father at hand. So that the only means which the master has of doing justice to the men employed by him is to ask himself sternly whether he is dealing with such subordinate as he would with his own son, if compelled by circumstances to take such a position.

Supposing the captain of a frigate were obliged to place his own son in the position of a common sailor; as he would then treat his son, he is bound always to treat every one of the men under him. So also supposing the master of a factory were obliged to place his own son in the position of an ordinary workman; as he would then treat his son, he is bound always to treat every one of his men. This is the only effective, true or practical Rule which can be given on this point of economics.

And as the captain of a ship is bound to be the last man to leave his ship in case of wreck and to share his last crust with the sailors in case of famine, so the manufacturer, in any commercial crisis, is bound to take the suffering of it with his men, and even to take more of it for himself than he allows his men to feel; as a father would in a famine, shipwreck or battle sacrifice himself for his son.

All this sounds very strange; the only real strangeness in the matter being, nevertheless, that it should so sound. For all this is true everlastingly and practically; all other doctrine than this being impossible in practice, consistently with any progressive state of national life; all the life which we now possess as a nation showing itself in the denial by a few strong minds and faithful hearts of the economic principle taught to our multitudes, which

principles, so far as accepted, lead straight to national destruction. Respecting the modes and forms of destruction to which they lead I hope to reason farther in a following paper.

## 02. THE VEINS OF WEALTH

The answer which would be made by any ordinary economist to the statement in the preceding paper, is in a few words as follows:

"It is true that certain advantages of a general nature may be obtained by the development of social affections. But economists never take such advantages into consideration. Our science is simply the science of getting rich. So far from being fallacious, it is found by experience to be practically effective. Persons who follow its precepts do become rich, and persons who disobey them become poor. Every capitalist of Europe has acquired his fortune by following the laws of our science. It is vain to bring forward tricks of logic against the force of accomplished facts. Every man of business knows by experience how money is made and how it is lost."

Pardon me. Men of business do indeed make money, but they do not know if they make it by fair means or if their money-making contributes to national welfare. They rarely know the meaning of the word 'rich'. At least if they know, they do not allow for the fact that it is a relative word, implying its opposite 'poor' as positively as the word 'north' implies its opposite 'south'. Men write as if it were possible, by following certain scientific precepts, for everybody to be rich. Whereas riches are a power like that of electricity, acting only through inequalities or negations of itself. The force of the guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbour's pocket. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of power it possesses depends accurately upon the need he has for it, and the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor.

I wish the reader clearly to understand the difference between the two economies, to which the terms, 'political' and 'mercantile' might be attached.

Political economy consists simply in the production, preservation and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things. The farmer who cuts his hay at the right time; the builder who lays good bricks in well-tempered mortar; the housewife who takes care of her furniture in the parlour and guards against all waste in her kitchen are all political economists in the true and final sense, adding continually to the riches and well-being of the nation to which they belong.

But mercantile economy signifies the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal claim upon, or power over, the labour of others; every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side as it implies riches or right on the other.

The idea of riches among active men in civilized nations generally refers to such commercial wealth; and in estimating their possessions, they rather calculate the value of their horses and fields by the number of guineas they could get for them, than the value of their guineas by the number of horses and fields they could buy with them.

Real property is of little use to its owner, unless together with it he has commercial power over labour. Thus suppose a man has a large estate of fruitful land with rich beds of gold in its gravel; countless herds of cattle; houses, and gardens and storehouses; but suppose, after all, that he could get no servants? In order that he may be able to have servants, some one in his neighbourhood must be poor and in want of his gold or his corn. Assume that no one is in want of either, and that no servants are to be had. He must therefore bake his own bread, make his own clothes, plough his own ground and shepherd his own flocks. His gold will be as useful to him as any other yellow pebbles on his estate. His stores must rot, for he cannot consume them. He can eat no more than another man could eat, and wear no more than another man could wear. He must lead a life of severe and common labour to procure even ordinary comforts.

The most covetous of mankind would, with small exultation, I presume, accept riches of this kind on these terms. What is really desired, under the name of riches is, essentially, power over men; in its simplest sense, the power of obtaining for our own advantage the labour of servant, tradesman and artist. And this power of wealth of course is greater or less in direct proportion to the poverty of the men over whom it is exercised and in inverse proportion to the number of persons who are as rich as ourselves, and who are ready to give the same price for an article of which the supply is limited. If the musician is poor, he will sing for small pay, as long as there is only one person who can pay him; but if there be two or three, he will sing for the one who offers him most. So that the art of becoming 'rich' in the common sense is not only the art of accumulating much money for ourselves but also of contriving that our neighbours shall have less. In accurate terms it is 'the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour'.

The rash and absurd assumption that such inequalities are necessarily advantageous lies at the root of most of the popular fallacies on the subject of economics. For the beneficialness of the inequality depends first, on the methods by which it was accomplished and secondly, on the purposes to which it is applied. Inequalities of wealth, unjustly established, have assuredly injured the nation in which they exist during their establishment; and unjustly directed, injure it yet more during their existence. But inequalities of wealth, justly established, benefit the nation in the course of their establishment; and nobly used, aid it yet more by their existence.

Thus the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in the natural body. There is one quickness of the current which comes of cheerful emotion or wholesome exercise; and another which comes of shame or of fever. There is a flush of the body which is full of warmth and life; and another which will pass into putrefaction.

Again even as diseased local determination of the blood involves depression of the general health of the system, all morbid local action of riches will be found ultimately to involve a weakening of the resources of the body politic.

Suppose two sailors cast away on an uninhabited coast and obliged to maintain themselves there by their own labour for a series of years.

If they both kept their health, and worked steadily and in amity with each other, they might build themselves a house and in time to come possess some cultivated land together with various stores laid up for future use. All these things would be real riches or property; and supposing the men both to have worked equally hard, they would each have right to equal share or use of it. Their political economy would consist merely in the careful preservation and just division of these possessions.

Perhaps however after some time one or other might be dissatisfied with the results of their common farming; and they might in consequence agree to divide the land into equal shares, so that each might thenceforward work in his own field and live by it. Suppose that after this arrangement had been made, one of them was to fall ill, and be unable to work on his land at a critical time—say of sowing or harvest. He would naturally ask the other to sow or reap for him.

Then his companion might say, with perfect justice, 'I will do this additional work for you; but if I do it, you must promise to do as much for me at another time. I will count how many hours I spend on your ground, and you shall give me a written promise to work for the same number of hours on mine, whenever I need your help, and you are able to give it.'

Suppose the disabled man's sickness to continue, and that under various circumstances, for several years, requiring the help of the other, he on each occasion gave a written pledge to work, as soon as he was able, at his companion's orders, for the same number of hours as the other had given up to him.

What will the positions of the two men be when the invalid is able to resume work?

Considered as a 'polis' or state, they will be poorer than they would have been otherwise; poorer by the withdrawal of what the sick man's labour would have produced in the interval. His friend may perhaps have toiled with an energy quickened by the enlarged need but in the end his own land must have suffered by the withdrawal of so much of his time from it; and the united property of the two men will be less than it would have been if both had remained in health and activity.

But the relations in which they stand to each other are also widely altered. The sick man has not only pledged his labour for some years, but will have exhausted his share of the stores, and will be in consequence for some time dependent on the other for food, for which he can only 'pay' him by yet more deeply pledging his own labour.

Supposing the written promises to be held entirely valid, the person who had hitherto worked for both might now, if he chose, rest altogether, and pass his time in idleness, not only forcing his companion to redeem all his previous pledges but exacting from him pledges for further labour, to an arbitrary amount, for what food he had to advance to him.

There might not be the least illegality (in the ordinary sense of the word) in the arrangement; but if a stranger arrived on the coast at this advanced stage of their political economy, he would find one man commercially Rich; the other commercially Poor. He would see, with no small surprise, one passing his days in idleness; the other labouring for both and living sparely, in the hope of recovering his independence at some distant period.

What I want the reader to note especially is the fact that the establishment of the mercantile wealth which consists in a claim upon labour signifies a political diminution of the real wealth which consists in substantial possessions.

Take another example, more consistent with the ordinary course of affairs of trade. Suppose that three men, instead of two, formed the little isolated republic, and were obliged to separate, in order to farm different pieces of land at some distance from each other: each estate furnishing a distinct kind of

produce and each in need of the material raised on the other. Suppose that the third man, in order to save the time of all three, simply superintends the transference of commodities from one farm to the other, on condition of receiving a share of every parcel of goods conveyed.

If this carrier always brings to each estate, from the other, what is chiefly wanted, at the right time, the operations of the two farmers will prosper, and the largest possible result in produce or wealth will be attained by the little community. But suppose no intercourse between the landowners is possible, except through the travelling agent; and that after a time, this agent keeps back the articles with which he has been entrusted until there comes a period of extreme necessity for them, on one side or other, and then exacts in exchange for them all that the distressed farmer can spare of other kinds of produce; it is easy to see that by ingeniously watching his opportunities, he might possess himself of the greater part of the surplus produce of the two estates, and at last, in a year of scarcity, purchase both for himself and maintain the former proprietors thenceforward as his labourers or servants.

This would be a case of commercial wealth acquired on the exactest principles of modern political economy. But it is clear in this instance also that the wealth of the State or of the three men considered as a society, is collectively less than it would have been if the merchant had been content with juster profit. The operations of the two farmers have been cramped to the utmost; the limitations of the supply of things they wanted at critical times, together with the failure of courage consequent on the prolongation of a struggle for mere existence, must have diminished the effective results of their labour; and the stores accumulated by the merchant will not be of equivalent value to those which, had he been honest, would have filled the granaries of the farmers and his own.

The question, therefore, respecting not only the advantage but even the quantity of national wealth, resolves itself finally into one of abstract justice. The - real value of acquired wealth depends on the moral sign attached to it, just, as sternly as that of a mathematical quantity depends on the algebraical

sign attached to it. Any given accumulation of commercial wealth, may be indicative, on the one hand, of faithful industries, progressive energies and productive ingenuities; or on the other hand, it may be indicative of mortal luxury, merciless tyranny, ruinous chicanery.

And these are not merely moral attributes of riches, which the seeker of riches may, if he chooses, despise; the, are literally material attributes of riches, depreciating or exalting the monetary signification of the sum in question. One mass of money is the outcome of action which has created,—another, of action which has annihilated,—ten times as much in the gathering of it.

Therefore the idea that directions can be given for the gaining of wealth, irrespectively of the consideration of its moral sources is perhaps the most insolently futile of all that ever beguiled men through their vices. So far as I know, there is not in history record of anything, so disgraceful to the human intellect as the modern idea that the commercial text 'Buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest' represents an available principle of national economy. Buy in the cheapest market?—yes; but what made your market cheap? Charcoal may be cheap among your roof timbers after a fire and bricks may be cheap in your streets after an earthquake; but fire and earthquake may not therefore be national benefits. Sell in the dearest?—yes, truly; but what made your market dear? You sold your bread well today; was it to a dying man who gave his last coin for it and will never need bread more; or to a rich man who tomorrow will buy your farm over your head; or to a soldier on his way to pillage the bank in which you have put your fortune?

None of these things you can know. One thing only you can know; namely whether this dealing of yours is a just and faithful one, which is all you need concern yourself about respecting it; sure thus to have done your part in bringing about ultimately in the world a state of things which will not issue in pillage or in death.

It has been shown that the chief value of money consists in its having power over human beings; that without this power large material possessions are useless, and to a person possessing such power, comparatively unnecessary. But power over human beings is attainable by other means than by money.

In this moral power there is a monetary value as real as that represented by more ponderous currencies. A man's hand may be full of invisible gold, and the wave of it or the grasp shall do more than another's with a shower of bullion.

But farther. Since the essence of wealth consists in its authority over men, if the apparent wealth fails in this power, it ceases to be wealth at all. It does not appear lately in England that our authority over men is absolute.

Finally since the essence of wealth consists in power over men, will it not follow that the nobler and the more in number the persons are over whom it has power, the greater the wealth? Perhaps it may even appear after some consideration that the persons themselves *are* the wealth; not gold and silver. The true veins of wealth are purple—and not in Rock but in Flesh. The final consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human beings. In some far-away and yet undreamt-of hour I can even imagine that instead of adorning the turbans of her slaves with diamonds from Golkonda and thus showing off her material wealth, England, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of a non-Christian one and be able to lead forth her Sons, saying,

"These are MY Jewels."

### 03. EVEN-HANDED JUSTICE

Some centuries before the Christian era, a Jew merchant, reported to have made one of the largest fortunes of his time (held also in repute for much practical sagacity), left among his ledgers some general maxims which have been preserved even to our own days. They were held in respect by the Venetians who placed a statue of the old Jew on the angle of one of their principal buildings. Of late years these writings have fallen into disrepute, being opposed to the spirit of modern commerce.

He says for instance in one place: 'The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death'; adding in another, with the same meaning: 'Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but truth delivers from death.' Both these passages are notable for their assertions of death as the only real issue and sum of attainment by any unjust scheme of wealth. If we read instead of 'lying tongue', 'lying label, title, pretence or advertisement', we shall more clearly perceive the bearing of these words on modern business.

Again the wise man says: 'He that oppreseth the poor to increase his riches shall surely come to want.' And again more strongly: 'Rob not the poor because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the place of business. For God shall spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.'

This 'robbing the poor because he is poor' is especially the mercantile form of theft, consisting in taking advantage of a man's necessities in order to obtain his labour or property at a reduced price. The ordinary highwayman robs the rich, but the trader robs the poor.

But the two most remarkable passages are the following:

'The rich and the poor have met.

God is their maker.'

'The rich and the poor have met.

God is their light.'

They 'have met.' That is to say, as long as the world lasts the action and counteraction of wealth and poverty is just as appointed a law of the world as the flow of stream to sea: 'God is their maker.' But also this action may be either gentle and just, or convulsive and destructive; it may be by rage of devouring flood or by lapse of serviceable wave. And which of these it shall be, depends on both rich and poor knowing that God is their light.

The flowing of streams is in one respect a perfect image of the action of wealth. Where the land falls, the water flows. So wealth must go where it is required. But the disposition and administration of rivers can be altered by human forethought. Whether the stream shall be a curse or a blessing depends upon man's labour and administering intelligence. For centuries districts of the world, rich in soil and favoured in climate, have lain desert under the rage of their own rivers; not only desert, but plague-struck. The stream which, rightly directed, would have flowed in soft irrigation from field to field—would have purified the air, given food to man and beast, and carried their burdens for them on its bosom—now overwhelms the plain and poisons the wind; its breath pestilence, and its work famine. In like manner human laws can guide the flow of wealth. This the leading trench and limiting mound can do so thoroughly that it shall become water of life—the riches of the hand of wisdom; or on the contrary, by leaving it to its own lawless flow, they may make it the last and deadliest of national plagues: water of Marah—the water which feeds the roots of all evil.

The necessity of these laws of distribution or restraint is curiously overlooked in the ordinary economist's definition of his own 'science'. He calls it the 'science of getting rich'. But there are many sciences as well as many arts of getting rich. Poisoning people of large estates was one employed largely in the middle ages; adulteration of food of people of small estates is one employed largely now. All these come under the general head of sciences or arts of getting rich.

So the economist in calling his science the science of getting rich must attach some ideas of limitation to its character. Let us assume that he means his science to be the science of 'getting rich by legal or just means'. In this definition is the word 'just' or 'legal' finally to stand? For it is possible that proceedings may be legal which are by no means just. If therefore we leave at last only the word 'just' in that place of our definition, it follows that in order to grow rich scientifically, we must grow rich justly; and therefore know what is just. It is the privilege of the fishes, as it is of rats, and wolves, to live by the laws of demand and supply; but it is the distinction of humanity to live by those of right.

We have to examine then what are the laws of justice respecting payment of labour.

Money payment, as stated in my last paper, consists radically in a promise to some person working for us, that for the time and labour he spends in our service today we will give or procure equivalent time and labour in his service at any future time when he may demand it.

If we promise to give him less labour than he has given us, we under-pay him. If we promise to give him more labour than he has given us, we over-pay him.

In practice, when two men are ready to do the work and only one man wants to have it done, the two men underbid each other for it; and the one who gets it to do is under-paid. But when two men want the work done and there is only one man ready to do it, the two men who want it done overbid each other, and the workman is over-paid. The central principle of right or just payment lies between these two points of injustice.

Inasmuch as labour rightly directed is fruitful just as seed is, the fruit (or 'interest' as it is called) of the labour first given, or 'advanced', ought to be taken into account and balanced by an additional quantity of labour in the subsequent repayment. Therefore the typical form of bargain will be: If you give me an hour today, I will give you an hour and five minutes on demand. If you give me a pound of bread today, I will give you seventeen ounces on demand and so on.

Now if two men are ready to do the work and if I employ one who offers to work at half price he will be half-starved while the other man will be left out of employment. Even if I pay due wages to the workman chosen by me, the other man will be unemployed. But then my workman will not have to starve, and I shall have made a just use of my money. If I pay due wages to my man, I shall not be able to amass unnecessary riches, to waste money on luxuries and to add to the mass of poverty in the world. The workman who receives due wages from me will act justly to his subordinates. Thus the stream of justice will not dry up, but gather strength as it flows onward. And the nation with such a sense of justice will be happy and prosperous.

We thus find that the economists are wrong in thinking that competition is good for a nation. Competition only enables the purchaser to obtain his labour unjustly cheap, with the result that the rich grow richer and the poor poorer. In the long run it can only lead the nation to ruin. A workman should receive a just wage according to his ability. Even then there will be competition of a sort, but the people will be happy and skilful, because they will not have to underbid one another, but to acquire new skills in order to secure employment. This is the secret of the attractiveness of government services in which salaries are fixed according to the gradation of posts. The candidate for it does not offer to work with a lower salary but only claims that he is abler than his competitors. The same is the case in the army and in the navy, where there is little corruption. But in trade and manufacture there is oppressive competition, which results in fraud, chicanery and theft. Rotten goods are manufactured. The manufacturer, the labourer, the consumer,—each is mindful of his own interest. This poisons all human intercourse. Labourers starve and go on strike. Manufacturers become rogues and consumers too neglect the ethical aspect of their own conduct. One injustice leads to many others, and in the end the employer, the operative and the customer are all unhappy and go to rack and ruin. The very wealth of the people acts among them as a curse.

Nothing in history has been so disgraceful to human intellect as the acceptance among us of the common doctrines of economics as a science. I know no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion.

The writings which we (verbally) esteem as divine not only denounce the love of money as the source of all evil, and as an idolatry abhorred of the deity, but declare mammon service to be the accurate and irreconcilable opposite of God's service; and whenever they speak of riches absolute and poverty absolute, declare woe to the rich and blessing to the poor.

True economics is the economics of justice. People will be happy in so far as they learn to do justice and be righteous. All else is not only vain but leads straight to destruction. To teach the people to get rich by hook or by crook is to do them an immense disservice.

#### 04. AD VALOREM

We have seen how the ideas upon which political economy is based are misleading. Translated into action they can only make the individual and the nation unhappy. They make the poor poorer and the rich richer and none are any the happier for it.

Economics do not take the conduct of men into account but hold that the accumulation of wealth is the sign of prosperity, and that the happiness of nations depends upon their wealth alone. The more factories, the merrier. Thus men leave village farms with their spring winds and coming to cities, live diminished lives in the midst of noise, of darkness, and of deadly exhalation. This leads to deterioration of the national physique, and to increasing avarice and immorality. If someone talks of steps to be taken to eradicate vice, so-called wise men will say that it is of no use at all that the poor should receive education and that it is best to let things alone. They however forget that the rich are responsible for the immorality of the poor, who work like slaves in order to supply them with their luxuries, and have not a moment which they can call their own for self-betterment. Envy the rich, the poor also try to be rich, and when they fail in this effort, they are angry. They then lose their senses and try to make money by force or fraud. Thus both wealth and labour are barren of all fruit or else are utilized for chicanery.

Labour in the real sense of the term is that which produces useful articles. Useful articles are those which support human life, such as food, clothes or houses, and enable men to perfect the functions of their own lives to the utmost and also to exercise a helpful influence over the lives of others. The establishment of big factories with a view to getting rich may lead a person into sin. Many people amass riches but few make a good use of it. Accumulated wealth which leads to the destruction of a nation is of no earthly use. The capitalists of modern times are responsible for widespread and unjust wars which originate from the covetousness of mankind.

Some people say that it is not possible to impart knowledge so as to ameliorate the condition of the masses; let us therefore live as seems fit and amass riches. But this is an immoral attitude. For the good man who observes ethical rules and does not give way to greed has a disciplined mind, does not stray from the right path, and influences others by his acts. If the individuals who constitute a nation are immoral, so is the nation too. If we behave as we choose and at the same time take our neighbours to task for their wrongdoing, the results can only be disappointing.

We thus see that money is only an instrument which makes for misery as well as happiness. In the hands of a good man it helps in the cultivation of land and the harvesting of crops. Cultivators work in innocent contentment and the nation is happy. But in the hands of a bad man, money helps to produce say gunpowder which works havoc among its manufacturers as well as among its victims. Therefore THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.

This is not a time for self-indulgence but for each of us to labour according to our capacity. If one man lives in idleness, another has to put in a double amount of work. This is at the root of the distress of the poor in England. Some so-called work is nugatory as in jewel-cutting and even destructive as in war. It brings about a diminution in the national capital, and is not beneficial to the worker himself. It seems as if men are employed, but really they are idle. The rich oppress the poor by misuse of riches. Employers and employees are at daggers drawn with one another, and men are reduced to the level of beasts.

## CONCLUSION

Ruskin's book thus paraphrased has a lesson for Indians no less than for the Englishmen to whom it was primarily addressed. New ideas are in the air in India. Our young men who have received Western education are full of spirit. This spirit should be directed into the right channels, as otherwise it can only do us harm. 'Let us have Swaraj' is one slogan; let us industrialize the country' is another.

But we hardly understand what Swaraj is. Natal for instance enjoys Swaraj but her Swaraj stinks in our nostrils, for she crushes the negroes, and oppresses the Indians. If by some chance the negroes and the Indians left Natal, its white men would fight among themselves and bring about their own destruction.

If not like Natal's will we have Swaraj as in the Transvaal one of whose leaders, General Smuts, breaks his promises, says one thing and does another? He has dispensed with the services of English policemen and employed Afrikanders instead. I do not think that this is going to help any of the two nationalities in the long run. Selfish men will loot their own people, when there are no more 'outsiders' left to be looted.

Thus Swaraj is not enough to make a nation happy. What would be the result of Swaraj being conferred on a band of robbers? They would be happy only if they were placed under the control of a good man who was not a robber himself. The United States, England and France for instance are powerful States, but there is no reason to think that they are really happy.

Swaraj really means self-control. Only he is capable of self-control who observes the rules of morality, does not cheat or give up truth, and does his duty to his parents, wife and children, servants and neighbours. Such a man is in enjoyment of Swaraj, no matter where he lives. A State enjoys Swaraj if it can boast of a large number of such good citizens.

It is not right that one people should rule another. British rule in India is an evil, but let us not run away with the idea that all will be well when the British quit India.

The existence of British rule in the country is due to our disunity, immorality and ignorance. If these national defects were overcome, not only would the British leave India without a shot being fired but we would be enjoying real Swaraj.

Some foolish Indians rejoice in bomb-throwing, but if all the Britishers in the country were thus killed, the killers would become the rulers of India who would only have a change of masters. The bomb now thrown at Englishmen will be aimed at Indians after the English are there no longer. It was a Frenchman who murdered the President of the French Republic. It was an American who murdered President Cleveland. Let us not blindly imitate Western people.

If Swaraj cannot be attained by the sin of killing Englishmen, it cannot be attained either by the erection of huge factories. Gold and silver may be accumulated but they will not lead to the establishment of Swaraj. Ruskin has proved this to the hilt. Western civilization is a mere baby, a hundred or only fifty years old. And yet it has reduced Europe to a sorry plight. Let us pray that India is saved from the fate that has overtaken Europe, where the nations are poised for an attack on one another, and are silent only because of the stockpiling of armaments. Some day there will be an explosion, and then Europe will be a veritable hell on earth. Non-white races are looked upon as legitimate prey by every European State. What else can we expect where covetousness is the ruling passion in the breasts of men? Europeans pounce upon new territories like crows upon a piece of meat. I am inclined to think that this is due to their mass-production factories.

India must indeed have Swaraj but she must have it by righteous methods. Our Swaraj must be real Swaraj, which cannot be attained by either violence or industrialization. India was once a golden land, because Indians then had hearts of gold. The land is still the same but it is a desert because we are corrupt. It

can become a land of gold again only if the base metal of our present national character is transmuted into gold. The philosopher's stone which can effect this transformation<sup>1</sup> is a little word of two syllables - *Satya* (Truth). If every Indian sticks to truth, Swaraj will come to us of its own accord.

*1 'Institutions', says Herbert Spencer, 'are dependent on character; and however changed in their superficial aspects, cannot be changed in their essential natures faster than character changes.'*

V.G.D.