

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
NATIONAL LIBRARY, CALCUTTA.

---

Class No.

156.D

Book No.

1653

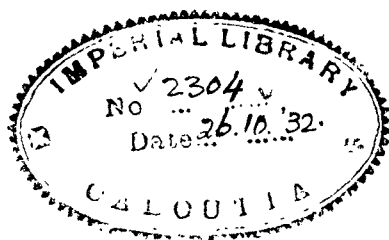
N. L. 38.

MGIPC—S8—21 LNL/59—25-5-60—50,000.

## THE CHILD

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

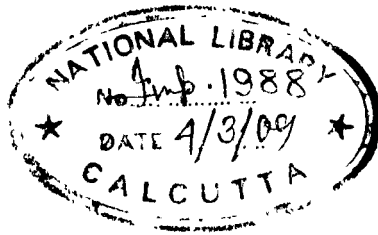
THE CHILD



LONDON  
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
MUSEUM STREET

PUBLISHED IN 1931

# **RARE BOOK**



Printed and made in  
Great Britain at The  
Curwen Press

## THE CHILD

( I )

‘What of the night?’ they ask.

No answer comes.

For the blind Time gropes in a maze and knows not  
its path or purpose.

The darkness in the valley stares like the dead  
eye-sockets of a giant,  
the clouds like a nightmare oppress the sky,  
and the massive shadows lie scattered like the torn  
limbs of the night.

A lurid glow waxes and wanes on the horizon,—  
is it an ultimate threat from an alien star,  
or an elemental hunger licking the sky?

Things are deliriously wild,  
they are a noise whose grammar is a groan,  
and words smothered out of shape and sense.

They are the refuse, the rejections, the fruitless failures  
of life,

abrupt ruins of prodigal pride,—  
fragments of a bridge over the oblivion of a vanished  
stream,

godless shrines that shelter reptiles,  
marble steps that lead to blankness.

Sudden tumults rise in the sky and wrestle  
and a startled shudder runs along the sleepless  
hours.

Are they from desperate floods  
    hammering against their cave walls,  
or from some fanatic storms  
    whirling and howling incantations?  
Are they the cry of an ancient forest  
    flinging up its hoarded fire in a last extravagant  
    suicide,  
or screams of a paralytic crowd scourged by lunatics  
    blind and deaf?  
Underneath the noisy terror a stealthy hum creeps up  
    like bubbling volcanic mud,  
    a mixture of sinister whispers, rumours and  
    slanders, and hisses of derision.  
The men gathered there are vague like torn pages of  
    an epic.  
Groping in groups or single, their torchlight tattoos  
    their faces in chequered lines, in patterns of  
    frightfulness.  
The maniacs suddenly strike their neighbours on  
    suspicion  
and a hubbub of an indiscriminate fight bursts forth  
    echoing from hill to hill.  
The women weep and wail,  
    they cry that their children are lost in a wilderness  
    of contrary paths with confusion at the end.  
Others defiantly ribald shake with raucous laughter  
    their lascivious limbs unshrinkingly loud,  
    for they think that nothing matters.

( II )

There on the crest of the hill  
    stands the Man of faith amid the snow-white  
        silence,  
He scans the sky for some signal of light,  
and when the clouds thicken and the nightbirds  
    scream as they fly,  
he cries, 'Brothers, despair not, for Man is great.'  
But they never heed him,  
    for they believe that the elemental brute is eternal  
    and goodness in its depth is darkly cunning in  
        deception.  
When beaten and wounded they cry, 'Brother, where  
    art thou?'  
    The answer comes, 'I am by your side.'—  
But they cannot see in the dark  
    and they argue that the voice is of their own  
        desperate desire,  
that men are ever condemned to fight for phantoms  
    in an interminable desert of mutual menace.



( III )

The clouds part, the morning star appears in the East,  
a breath of relief springs up from the heart of the  
earth,  
the murmur of leaves ripples along the forest path,  
and the early bird sings.

‘The time has come,’ proclaims the Man of faith.

‘The time for what?’

‘For the pilgrimage.’

They sit and think, they know not the meaning,  
and yet they seem to understand according to their  
desires.

The touch of the dawn goes deep into the soil  
and life shivers along through the roots of all  
things.

‘To the pilgrimage of fulfilment,’ a small voice  
whispers, nobody knows whence.

Taken up by the crowd  
it swells into a mighty meaning.

Men raise their heads and look up,  
women lift their arms in reverence,  
children clap their hands and laugh.

The early glow of the sun shines like a golden garland  
on the forehead of the Man of faith,  
and they all cry: ‘Brother, we salute thee!’

( IV )

Men begin to gather from all quarters,  
    from across the seas, the mountains and pathless  
    wastes,  
They come from the valley of the Nile and the banks  
    of the Ganges,  
    from the snow-sunk uplands of Thibet,  
    from high-walled cities of glittering towers,  
    from the dense dark tangle of savage wilderness.  
Some walk, some ride on camels, horses and elephants,  
    on chariots with banners vying with the clouds  
    of dawn,  
The priests of all creeds burn incense, chanting verses  
    as they go.  
The monarchs march at the head of their armies,  
    lances flashing in the sun and drums beating loud.  
Ragged beggars and courtiers pompously decorated,  
    agile young scholars and teachers burdened with  
    learned age jostle each other in the crowd.  
Women come chatting and laughing,  
mothers, maidens and brides,  
    with offerings of flowers and fruit,  
    sandal paste and scented water.  
Mingled with them is the harlot,  
    shrill of voice and loud in tint and tinsel.  
The gossip is there who secretly poisons the well  
    of human sympathy and chuckles.

The maimed and the cripple join the throng with the  
blind and the sick,  
the dissolute, the thief and the man who makes a  
trade of his God for profit and mimics the  
saint.

‘The fulfilment!’

They dare not talk aloud,  
but in their minds they magnify their own greed,  
and dream of boundless power,  
of unlimited impunity for pilfering and plunder,  
and eternity of feast for their unclean gluttonous  
flesh.

( V )

The Man of faith moves on along pitiless paths strewn  
with flints over scorching sands and steep  
mountainous tracks.

They follow him, the strong and the weak, the aged  
and young,

the rulers of realms, the tillers of the soil.

Some grow weary and footsore, some angry and  
suspicious.

They ask at every dragging step,

‘How much further is the end?’

The Man of faith sings in answer;

they scowl and shake their fists and yet they cannot  
resist him;

the pressure of the moving mass and indefinite  
hope push them forward.

They shorten their sleep and curtail their rest,

they out-vie each other in their speed,

they are ever afraid lest they may be too late for their  
chance

while others be more fortunate.

The days pass,

the ever-receding horizon tempts them with renewed  
lure of the unseen till they are sick.

Their faces harden, their curses grow louder and  
louder.

( VI )

It is night.

The travellers spread their mats on the ground  
under the banyan tree.

A gust of wind blows out the lamp  
and the darkness deepens like a sleep into a swoon.  
Someone from the crowd suddenly stands up  
and pointing to the leader with merciless finger  
breaks out:

‘False prophet, thou hast deceived us!’

Others take up the cry one by one,  
women hiss their hatred and men growl.

At last one bolder than others suddenly deals him a  
blow.

They cannot see his face, but fall upon him in a fury  
of destruction  
and hit him till he lies prone upon the ground his  
life extinct.

The night is still, the sound of the distant waterfall  
comes muffled,  
and a faint breath of jasmine floats in the air

( VII )

The pilgrims are afraid.

The women begin to cry, the men in an agony of  
wretchedness

shout at them to stop.

Dogs break out barking and are cruelly whipped into  
silence broken by moans.

The night seems endless and men and women begin to  
wrangle as to who among them was to blame.

They shriek and shout and as they are ready  
to unsheathe their knives

the darkness pales, the morning light overflows  
the mountain tops.

Suddenly they become still and gasp for breath as they  
gaze at the figure lying dead.

The women sob out loud and men hide their faces in  
their hands.

A few try to slink away unnoticed,  
but their crime keeps them chained  
to their victim.

They ask each other in bewilderment,  
‘Who will show us the path?’

The old man from the East bends his head and says:  
‘The Victim.’

They sit still and silent.

Again speaks the old man,

‘We refused him in doubt, we killed him in anger,  
now we shall accept him in love,  
for in his death he lives in the life of us all, the  
great Victim.’  
And they all stand up and mingle their voices and sing,  
‘Victory to the Victim.’

( VIII )

‘To the pilgrimage’ calls the young,  
    ‘to love, to power, to knowledge, to wealth  
    overflowing,’  
‘We shall conquer the world and the world beyond  
    this,’  
    they all cry exultant in a thundering cataract of  
    voices,  
The meaning is not the same to them all, but only the  
    impulse,  
    the moving confluence of wills that recks not death  
    and disaster.  
No longer they ask for their way,  
    no more doubts are there to burden their minds  
    or weariness to clog their feet.  
The spirit of the Leader is within them and ever  
    beyond them—  
the Leader who has crossed death and all limits.  
They travel over the fields where the seeds are sown,  
    by the granary where the harvest is gathered,  
and across the barren soil where famine dwells  
    and skeletons cry for the return of their flesh.  
They pass through populous cities humming with  
    life,  
    through dumb desolation hugging its ruined past,  
    and hovels for the unclad and unclean,  
    a mockery of home for the homeless.



They travel through long hours of the summer day,  
and as the light wanes in the evening they ask  
the man who reads the sky:  
‘Brother, is yonder the tower of our final hope  
and peace?’  
The wise man shakes his head and says:  
‘It is the last vanishing cloud of the sunset.’  
‘Friends,’ exhorts the young, ‘do not stop.  
Through the night’s blindness we must struggle  
into the Kingdom of living light.’  
They go on in the dark.  
The road seems to know its own meaning  
and dust underfoot dumbly speaks of direction.  
The stars—celestial wayfarers—sing in silent chorus:  
‘Move on, comrades!’  
In the air floats the voice of the Leader:  
‘The goal is nigh.’

( IX )

The first flush of dawn glistens on the dew-dripping  
leaves of the forest.

The man who reads the sky cries:

‘Friends, we have come!’

They stop and look around.

On both sides of the road the corn is ripe to the  
horizon,

—the glad golden answer of the earth to the  
morning light.

The current of daily life moves slowly

between the village near the hill and the one  
by the river bank.

The potter’s wheel goes round, the woodcutter brings  
fuel to the market,

the cow-herd takes his cattle to the pasture,  
and the woman with the pitcher on her head  
walks to the well.

But where is the King’s castle, the mine of gold,  
the secret book of magic,

the sage who knows love’s utter wisdom?

‘The stars cannot be wrong,’ assures the reader of the sky.

‘Their signal points to that spot.’

And reverently he walks to a wayside spring  
from which wells up a stream of water, a liquid light,  
like the morning melting into a chorus of tears  
and laughter.

Near it in a palm grove surrounded by a strange hush  
stands a leaf-thatched hut,  
at whose portal sits the poet of the unknown shore, and  
sings:  
    'Mother, open the gate!'

( X )

A ray of morning sun strikes aslant at the door.  
The assembled crowd feel in their blood the primæval  
chant of creation:

‘Mother, open the gate!’

The gate opens.

The mother is seated on a straw bed with the babe on  
her lap,

Like the dawn with the morning star.

The sun’s ray that was waiting at the door outside  
falls on the head of the child.

The poet strikes his lute and sings out:

‘Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living.’

They kneel down,—the king and the beggar, the saint  
and the sinner,

the wise and the fool,—and cry:

‘Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living.’

The old man from the East murmurs to himself:

‘I have seen!’

BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE

THE RELIGION OF MAN

being

The Hibbert Lecture, 1930

‘The whole book is rich in profound thought and poetic speech . . . he has never written anything so penetrating and illuminating on the nature of things.’—*News Chronicle*.

‘The value of the book lies in its rich suggestiveness, in the constant disclosure of music and happiness at the heart of things.’—*Friend*.

‘The poet’s thesis is set forth in language of great distinction and beauty.’—*Spectator*.

LETTERS TO A FRIEND

Edited, with Two Introductions, by

C. F. Andrews

*Third Impression*

‘Occasionally there does come a book which will tell the reader things he ought to know, will be the poorer for not knowing, and cannot find elsewhere; such a book is these Letters.’—*Times Literary Supplement*.

*With portraits in collotype*

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LIMITED



GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
LONDON: 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C.1  
CAPE TOWN: 73 ST. GEORGE'S STREET  
SYDNEY, N.S.W.: WYNVARD SQUARE  
AUCKLAND, N.Z.: 41 ALBERT STREET  
TORONTO: 91 WELLINGTON STREET, WEST