

Oh Martyrs – London 1908

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The battle of freedom once begun
And handed down from sire to son
Though often lost is ever won!!

To-day is the tenth of May! It was on this day, that in the ever memorable year of 1857, the first campaign of the War of Independence was opened by you, Oh Martyrs, on the battle-field of India. The Motherland, awakened to the sense of her degrading slavery,

Unsheathed her sword, burst forth from the shackles and struck the first blow for her liberty and for her honour. It was on this day that the war-cry 'Maro Feringhee Ko' was raised by the throats of thousands. It was on this day that the sepoys of Meerut, having risen in a terrible uprising, marched down to Delhi, saw the waters of the Jamuna, glittering in the sunshine, caught one of those historical moments which close past epoch to introduce a new one, and 'had found, in a moment, a leader, a flag and a cause, and converted the mutiny into a national and a religious war.'

All honour be to you, oh Martyrs. For it was for the preservation of the honour of the race that you performed the fiery ordeal of a revolution when the religions of the land were threatened with a forcible and sinister conversion, when the hypocrite threw off his friendly garb and stood up into the naked heinousness of a perfidious foe breaking treaties, smashing crowns, forging chains and mocking all the while our merciful mother for the very honesty with which she believed the pretensions of the white liar, then you, oh Martyrs of 1857, awoke the mother, inspired the mother, and for the honour of the mother, rushed to the battlefield terrible and tremendous with the war-cry 'Maro Feringhee Ko' on your lips, and with the sacred mantra God and Hindusthan on your banner ! Well did you do in rising. For otherwise, although your blood might have been spared, yet the stigma of servility would have been the deeper, one more link would have been added to the cursed chain of demoralizing patience, and the world would have again contemptuously pointed to our nation saying, 'She deserves slavery, she is happy in slavery.' For even in 1857, she did not raise even a finger to protect her interest and her honour!

This day, therefore, we dedicate, oh Martyrs, to your inspiring memory! It was on this day that you raised a new flag to be upheld, you uttered a mission to be fulfilled, you saw a vision to be realized, you proclaimed a nation to be born!

We take up your cry, we revere your flag, we are determined to continue that fiery mission of 'away with the foreigner', which you uttered, amidst the prophetic thunderings of the Revolutionary war. Revolutionary, yes, it was a Revolutionary war. For the War of 1857 shall not cease till the revolution

arrives, striking slavery into dust, elevating liberty to the throne. Whenever a people arises for its freedom, whenever that seed of liberty gets germinated in the blood of its fathers, whenever that seed of liberty gets germinated in the blood of its Martyrs, and whenever there remains at least one true son to avenge that blood of his fathers, there never can be an end to such a war as this. No, a revolutionary war knows no truce, save liberty or death. We, inspired by your memory, determine to continue the struggle you began in 1857, we refuse to acknowledge the armistice as a truce; we look upon the battles you fought as the battles of the first campaign—the defeat of which cannot be the defeat of the war.

What? Shall the world say that India has accepted the defeat as the final one? That the blood of 1857 was shed in vain? That the sons of Ind betray their fathers' vows? No, by Hindusthan, no! The historical continuity of the Indian nation is not cut off. The war began on the 10th of May 1857 is not over on the 10th of May 1908, nor shall it ever cease till a 10th of May to come sees the destiny accomplished, sees the beautiful Ind crowned, either with the lustre of victory or with the halo of martyrdom.

But, O glorious Martyrs, in this pious struggle of your sons help. O help us by your inspiring presence! Torn in innumerable petty selves, we cannot realise the grand unity of the Mother. Whisper, then, unto us by what magic you caught the secret of Union. How the feringhee rule was shattered to pieces and the Swadeshi thrones were set up by the common consent of Hindus and Mahomedans. How in the higher love of the mother, united the difference of castes and creeds, how the venerated and venerable Bahadur Shah prohibited the killing of cows throughout India, Hew Shreemant Nanasahib after the first salute of the thundering cannon to the emperor of Delhi, reserved for himself the second one! How you staggered the whole world by uniting under the banner of mother and forced your enemies to say 'Among the many lessons the Indian Mutiny conveys to the historian and administrator, none is of greater importance than the warning that it is possible to have a revolution in which Brahmins and Shudras, Mahomedans and Hindus were united against us and that it is not safe to suppose that the peace and stability of our dominion in any great measure depends on the continent being inhabited by different races with different religious systems, for they mutually understand each other and respect and take part in each other's modes and ways and doings. The mutiny reminds us that our dominions rest on a thin crust ever likely to be rent by titanic fires of social changes and revolutions.' Whisper unto us the nobility of such an alliance of Religion and Patriotism, the true religion whichever is on the side of patriotism, the true patriotism which secures the freedom of religion.

And give us the marvellous energy daring and secrecy with which you organized the mighty volcano; show us the volcanic magma that underlie the green thin crust on which the foe is to be kept lulled into a false security; tell us how the chapatti, that fiery Cross of India flew from village to village and from valley to valley, setting the whole intellect of the nation on fire by the

very vagueness of its message and then let us hear the roaring thunder with which the volcano at last burst forth with an all shuttering force, rushing, smashing, burning and consuming into one continuous fiery flow of red-hot lava-flood! Within a month, regiment after regiment, prince after prince, city after city, sepoy, police, zemindars, Pundits, Moulvis, the multiple-headed Revolution sounded its tocsin and temples and mosques resounded with the cry 'Maro feringhee Ko' Away with the foreigners! MEERUT ROSE, Delhi rose, rose Benares, Agra, Patna, Lucknow, Allahabad, Jadagalpoor, Jhansi, Banda, Indore- from Peshwar to Calcutta and from the Narmada to the Himalayas, the volcano burst forth into a sudden, simultaneous and all consuming conflagration! !

And then, oh Martyrs, tell us the little as well as the great defects which you found out in our people in that great experiment of yours. But above all, point out that most ruinous, nay, the only material draw-back in the body of the nation which rendered all your efforts futile- the mean selfish blindness which refuses to see its way to join the nation's cause. Say that the only cause of the defeat of Hindusthan was Hindusthan herself, that shaking away the slumber of centuries, the mother rose to hit the foe, but while her right hand was striking the Feringhee dead, her left hand struck, alas, not the enemy, but her forehead! So she staggered and fell back into the inevitable swoon of 50 years.

Fifty years are past, but, oh restless spirits of 1857, we promise you with our hearts' blood that your Diamond Jubilee shall not pass without seeing your wishes fulfilled!! We have heard your voice and we gather courage from it. With limited means you sustained a war, not against tyranny alone, but against tyranny and treachery together. The Daub and Ayodhya making a united stand, waged a war, not only against the whole of the British power but against the rest of the India too; and yet you fought for three years and yet you had well-nigh snatched away the crown of Hindusthan and smashed the hollow existence of the alien rule. What an encouragement this! What the Duab and Ayodhya could do in a month, the simultaneous, sudden and determined rising of the whole of Hindusthan can do in a day. This hope illumines our hearts and assures us of success. And so we allow that your Diamond Jubilee year 1917 shall not pass without seeing the resurging Ind making a triumphant entry into the world. For, the bones of Bahadur Shah are crying vengeance from their grave! For, the blood of dauntless Laxmi is boiling with indignation! For, the shahid Peer Ali of Patna, when he was going to the gallows for having refused to divulge the secrets of the conspiracy whispered defiance to the Feringhee said in prophetic words 'You may hang me today, you may hang such as me everyday, but thousands will still rise in my place- your object will never be gained.'

Indians, these words must be fulfilled! Your blood, oh Martyrs, shall be avenged.

VANDE MATARAM