

MEN AND THEIR IDEAS
ALBERT SCHWEITZER

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PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



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By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

"..... We have entered a dark journey in a time of darkness"—this is how Albert Schweitzer portrays the present crisis of the Western Secular Civilization. He has studied the western society and its problems very keenly and dispassionately and has come to the conclusion that the trouble with the world is neither economic nor technological it is "Moral". He lays greatest emphasis on the moral renaissance of the world and declares that "Of all the force that mould reality, morality is the first and the foremost." **(Civilisation and Ethics, p. 22)**

Prof. Albert Schweitzer is a philosopher of great eminence. He was born in Kaiseisberg in 1875 and was educated at Sternberg, Paris and Berlin. He had been a visiting lecturer to several important Universities and is a great thinker and moral teacher. A. Schweitzer is the author of "The Philosophy of Civilization" (1928) two volumes (I) The Decay and restoration of Civilization and (II) Civilization and Ethics. The Quest of the Historical Jesus (English Translation, 1936) J.S Bach (English Translation. 1938); Indian thought and its development (English Translation. (1936) and many other books.

Albert Schweitzer is an eminent moral teacher of humanity and deals with fundamental problems of ethics at handsome length. He has discussed the nature and the role of ethical and morality in society and has suggested ways and means to realize the great ethical goal. He has also dealt with the rise and fall of civilizations and the part of morality in the history of mankind.

Sehweitzer's conception of civilization is preeminently ethical. He says that:

"Civilization is twofold in its nature: it realizes itself in the supremacy of reason, firstly over the forces of nature, and secondly, over the dispositions of man" **(The Philosophy of History)**

He holds that moral control over man's disposition is extremely important, even more important than the control over nature. Ethical mastery should be the be-all and end-all of over striving. Reverence for life is most essential for a healthy growth of civilisation and that moral progress occupies a much greater importance than material progress.

Looking upon the contemporary world, from this angle of vision, this angle of vision, this philosopher of history finds it caught in a nasty whirl of decay and degeneration. According to him the decline began around the middle of the nineteenth century and continuously progressed. Moral values faded into the thin air. The world is going ahead, slowly but steadily, towards a great crisis. This down ward march is very gravely viewed by Schweitzer who holds that contrary to the previous decay of civilizations, the present decay is much more important, because:

"the earth no longer lies in reserve, as it had once gifted peoples as yet unused, who can retain us and take our place in some distant future as leaders of spiritual life All of them are,

like ourselves, diseased, and only as we recover can they recover. "In the present crisis it is not the civilization of this or that people that must be given up as lost, but that of mankind present and future if, no rebirth takes place within the present civilization."

(The Philosophy of Civilization vol. I, p. 03)

Prof. Schweitzer lays his fingers at the real cause of the decay; he diagnoses that the root cause of the malady is ethical.

"If the ethical foundation is lacking, then civilization collapses, even when in other directions creative and intellectual forces of the strongest nature are at work"

(Quoted by P.I. Sorokin "Social Philosophies in an Age of Revolution" P. 177)

Reviewing the crisis of our age he expresses the view that the main cause of the arrest of progress is ethical..... the abandonment of the principles of life –affirmation. The philosophy of the eighteenth century put forward ethical - ideals and tried to translate them into practice, but this philosophy could not meet the acid test of rational criticism and succumbed to it because it was vulnerable and its foundations were weak. Attempts by Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Hegel and others to provide this tottering building with a new lease of life failed because their world-views too were vulnerable. As a result

'The ethical ideas on which civilization rests have been wandering about the world, Poverty stricken and homeless. No theory of the universe has been advanced which can give them a solid foundation... therefore, instead of being inspired by a profound and powerful spirit of affirmation of the world and life, the world is being pushed to and fro by "fragmentary and superficial ideologies" and by fruitless practices. Alas! We have entered a dark journey in a time of darkness".

(The Philosophy of 'Civilization vol. 1. P. 6)

Several other factors have added fuel to the fire: they have hastened the decay. They are: Modern man's fettered economic position; his being over-worked & incapable of self-collectedness; a decrease in creative thinking and an increase in superficial "mob-mindedness" pattered by various "manufactures of public opinion" (news, papers, etc.); lack of spiritual independence and humanity; development of ethical nihilism and an unethical conception of civilization; greater development of the material, rather than spiritual part of our civilization and a rapid advance in ethically indifferent knowledge and technology".

(The Philosophy of Civilisation I and II).

Schweitzer categorically declares that the drift towards decay and disaster can be arrested only by an ethical renaissance, a religious transfiguration of mankind. As to the principles of ethics and the source of morality, the writer of these lines is of the opinion that Schweitzer himself has failed to supply any adequate solution. His philosophy of "reverence for life" and "the life affirmation" are not at all satisfying and the cause is not far to seek. Human mind is hopelessly incapable of expounding these principles. Only Divine Guidance can offer the bridle that can control our passions and the light that can guide our steps in every walk of life.

"Verily, the true way of life, in the eyes of Allah is 'AL- ISLAM"—(Quran)
